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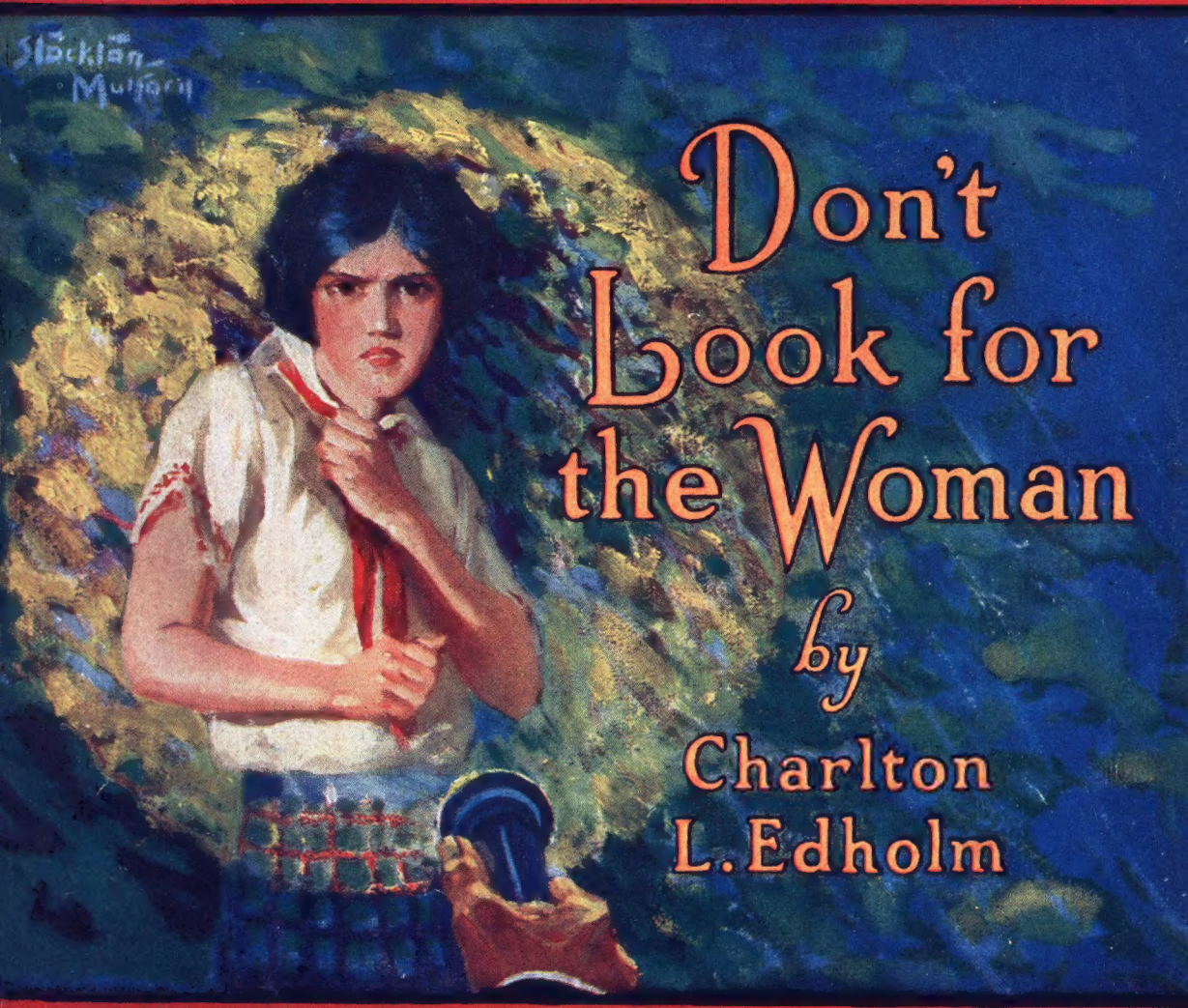

Don't Look for the Woman

by

Charlton L. Edholm

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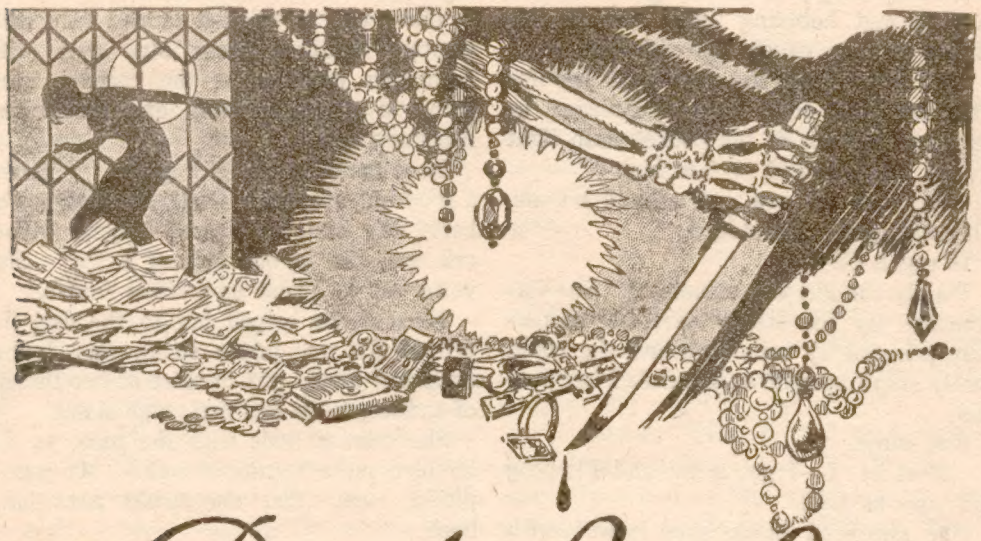

Don't Look for the Woman

By CHARLTON L. EDHOLM

Author of "Lookin' For Trouble," etc.

CHAPTER I.

CHIVALRY.

IT was a raw, drizzling night and the going was not good.

Kane Ryder watched ahead under the glare of his headlights and swung his roadster to avoid the holes in the highway.

He had to pick his path instead of buzzing along at thirty or forty miles an hour, for the wood-fringed road to Dr. Ludlow's estate was more romantic than speedy. It would be no joke to be stalled with a broken spring three hours after midnight, on such a dismal, dark and dirty night as this!

Suddenly a moaning cry sounded in his ears above the purr of his motor, and at the same instant his headlight picked out

a spot of color under the overhanging bushes at the bend of the road.

The brakes squealed as Kane jammed them hard, and the next moment he was splashing through the mud in pursuit of a slim figure in a plaid skirt of dull red and green.

"Get back, damn you!" This command came surprisingly from the girl who was limping and hobbling away through the bushes as Kane caught up with her.

Like a treed cat, she drew back her lips from her teeth in a snarl of defiance, as he threw the ray of his pocket flash light on her. She turned to face him.

"Lay off! If you put a hand on me, I'll croak you!" she added.

It was a bluff.

Plainly the girl was exhausted. She was drenched by the steady rain, her clothes were snagged by brambles, and she could barely stand upright as she defied her pursuer.

But game!

"Beat it! I—I got a gat and I'll plug you sure as hell!"

Her narrowed black eyes looked with deadly menace at the young man. Her dark hair and olive skin gave her the wild appearance of a bandit.

But even though her face was contorted with passion, Kane could not help seeing that she was not only young, but had a boyish, untamed beauty.

He held up a hand to reassure her.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he said.

"I'll say you won't!" She hesitated. "Who are you, anyway? A cop?"

"No, no! I'm not a cop and I'm not a ruffian. I'm just trying to help you."

"You want to help me?"

"Yes. I heard you groan. I thought you were hurt."

"I'm not hurt—much. Not so's I can't help myself. You're not stringin' me? You're not a bull nor a stick-up?"

"Of course, not. My name is Kane Ryder. I'm Dr. Ludlow's secretary."

"Ludlow? Who's that guy?"

"He's the owner of that big estate up the road. A fine man. Everybody knows him. You needn't be afraid."

But the girl was doubtful. Kane could hear her panting as she regarded him, and her young breast rose and fell under the wet silk of her blouse.

"Let me look at you!" she said abruptly.

Laughing at her suspicions yet sympathizing with her terror and distress, Kane turned the light upon his own face, blinking a trifle in the white glare.

There was revealed a tanned face with vigorous features, clear blue eyes with humorous wrinkles at the corners, altogether a pleasant, frank and determined American type.

In a moment the girl spoke. "You're a good kid, all right. God! I'm glad you're here! My name's O'Farrell—Gypsy O'Farrell and I'm in one hell of a fix." Her voice was as hoarse as a street Arab's.

Then as he helped her to the car, she proved she was just a small, very frightened and lonely girl in spite of her threats of sudden death and her tough slang.

She cried a little with the pain, as she hobbled on a wrenched ankle. It was a pitiful moan that she could not choke back.

Kane picked her up and lifted her gently into the car, and what she said was the age-old phrase of womankind to the masterful male.

"Gee! You're awful strong, buddy!" sighed Gypsy O'Farrell.

CHAPTER II.

HAVEN.

"WHERE to?" asked Kane as he threw in the clutch, and the car started through the mud.

"It's up to you, buddy," replied the girl.

"What do you mean, it's up to me?"

"You've adopted me. I guess I'm in your hands now."

"Where do you live? Don't you want to go home?"

"That's the last place in the world! My old man would beat me to death most likely. And besides it's a long ways from here. I live in Hell's Kitchen."

"Good Lord! What the deuce are you

doing away up the Hudson? How did you get here at this time of night?"

"In a car! A swell car! I've never been thrown out of a sweller car than that was!"

"Thrown out!"

"Yeah! Tige Moran threw me out!"

"Oh, I see, you were out riding with some young ruffian and he—"

"Two of them! It was Tige's car, but he had a friend along! 'Billy the Snitch!' I thought they was my friends until they got fresh."

"You resented their insults—"

"Nothin' like that! I handed them both a crack on the jaw, and the next thing I knew I was on my ear in the road. Those guys weren't real friends at all."

"Where did that happen?"

"Down on the main road, the Post Road to Albany. I ducked into the bushes and hid out on them or they'd have got me sure as hell. They was sore."

"And you've been wandering through the woods ever since, you poor little waif." Kane's voice was full of sympathy and wonder. He was sending the car along very cautiously, trying to decide what to do with this girl who had been wished on him so unexpectedly.

"Hadn't you better let me take you home?" he said. "Your father and mother will be wild if you don't come back tonight."

"My old man will be wild if I *do* show up—I ain't got no mother. But dad was fool enough to get drunk once when he had a day off, and when he come to he was married again. Gee! That pair sure can make home happy."

"Were you running away from home?" Kane was startled. He had no desire to be mixed up in a sordid case of a run-away girl from Hell's Kitchen. But Gypsy's voice took on a sudden note of terror as she cried:

"Oh, for God's sake, buddy, don't send me back! Have a heart! Dad's sore enough at me to beat me to a jelly, but that hellcat he's hitched up to—say! She's aiming to do me in for fair. She wants to put me away."

"How do you mean?"

"Reform school! Honest, I haven't done anything! The worst I ever done was to come home late a time or two, and if you knew what home was like you'd think I was a sap to ever come home at all. And just for that, they're trying to railroad me."

"You poor kid!" Kane knitted his brows and looked at her thoughtfully. "Where were you going when those two roughnecks tried to get gay with you?"

"To Albany. I thought they were good kids. They never acted like that before. They said I could get a swell job in a restaurant up in Albany."

"So they were helping you run away from home?"

"Yeah! I thought they was on the level. Tige Moran said he could run me up to Albany without no trouble. You see, being bootleggers they're going back and forth to the line right along. God!" she cried. "If I thought they wasn't straight, do you think I'd have gone with them like that? Not any!"

"The best thing I can do is to take you along to Dr. Ludlow's, I guess," said Kane after a few moments of silence. "He's a man with a lot of influence and plenty of friends. He'll find some way to help you get a start."

As he spoke the gateway of the estate showed under the glare of the headlights and Kane swung the car up the long, curving driveway that was overshadowed by fine old trees.

As they approached the house he could make out the white walls standing in sharp relief against the black sky, the pale outline of a spacious Colonial mansion. But it stood silent and dark as a vast mausoleum.

Kane looked at the clock on the dash of his car. It was well after three o'clock.

"Great Scott!" he said. "Everybody's turned in long ago. Not a light in the place!"

"Gee! It looks kind of scarey," said Gypsy. "Do you think they will let me stay?"

"Ssh! Don't make a noise!" replied Kane. "The doctor has a houseful of guests for the week-end, and I would feel

silly rousing the house and starting a commotion at this time of night."

Leaving his machine in the *porte-cochère,* he helped the girl ascend the broad stairs and let himself in with his key.

There was not a sound throughout this huge mansion. If any of the servants had been left with instructions to stay up for him, they had failed to do so. There was a watchman about the place, but he was probably sound asleep in some corner by this time.

Not a soul disturbed them as they picked their way slowly up the broad staircase to the upper floor.

Kane remembered that the guest room next to his own was unoccupied. As he threw the flash light along the hall he saw that the door stood ajar and, shoving it open, he led the girl inside.

The room was warm as toast. With a low gurgle of delight the half drowned waif stood over the radiator.

"Oh, boy!" she said. "Home was never like this!"

"Just stay there for a moment and I'll bring you some dry clothes, a dressing gown or something," said Kane.

But when he returned in a few minutes with a quilted dressing gown, a warm luxurious garment of silk and eiderdown, he found that Gypsy had curled up on the davenport like a stray kitten and was fast asleep.

For a few moments he stood over her, looking at that quaint little face with its shock of tumbled black hair and its eyelashes sweeping the flush of her cheek. Her red lips were slightly parted and showed the rows of little white teeth.

"Good Heavens!" thought Kane. "She is hardly more than a child!" His eye followed the delicate curve of her throat.

He caught his breath at the feeling of her helplessness, her trust in him, and he resolved to do everything in his power to give that exquisite creature a fighting chance in the fierce battle of life.

Very gently, so as not to wake her, he covered her slender body with the capacious folds of his dressing gown and turned to go to his own room.

Then he hesitated, turned back and stooped for an instant to kiss her on the forehead as he might have caressed a sleeping child.

CHAPTER III.

THE DREAM GIRL VANISHES.

THE memory of that girlish face haunted him, and in spite of his weariness Kane Ryder did not go to sleep for a long time.

She had looked so helpless and pathetic lying there with her head thrown back, and all the chivalry in the young man's character was aroused to protect her.

It would be an outrage to put such a high spirited creature, fragile and irresponsible as a wild bird, into some prisonlike institution. Instead of reforming her, the relentless system would probably send her out into the world, hardened, resentful and ripe for a life of crime.

Kane thought of the people who might help her out of her predicament. Among the guests under this roof were various wealthy people who could easily find a place for her.

There was Mrs. Anstruther, the widow of a multi-millionaire who had married her out of the Follies, and obligingly died within a few years, leaving her all his wealth. She had connections of all sorts in the theater and smart society. Certainly, she could find some way to help his little friend.

There was her sister, Mrs. Foster, married to a wealthy broker.

There was Major Fester who had all kinds of political connections in Washington. He might help her get a job.

There was Harry Thornton and Mr. and Mrs. Van Alstyne. All the week-end guests were people of means, to say nothing of Dr. Ludlow himself, who seemed to know everybody.

Eunice would take an interest in the girl he was sure—then on second thought he wondered whether Eunice Ludlow might resent the girl's presence and his interest in her, for between Kane Ryder and his employer's daughter there was a budding romance.

Kane resolved that in the morning he

would approach them one after another on behalf of Gypsy O'Farrell. His only regret was that he, himself, was an obscure and penniless ex-service man with nothing but his salary as Dr. Ludlow's secretary and no influential friends.

But somehow—somehow, he was going to be of service to that plucky little kid, and with these thoughts he drifted into sleep.

Later, how much later he did not know, Kane was aroused by an uneasy feeling that some one was stirring outside his door, that some one had sneaked into his room. He raised himself on one elbow and listened, for now he thought that the slight noises came from the next room where Gypsy slept. He strained his ears, but heard nothing further and, dog-tired as he was, decided that he had only dreamed of some one moving about.

Gradually his head sank upon his pillow and soon he was fast asleep dreaming of a fantastic tattered wood nymph who fled through a dark forest. Always he was in pursuit of this dream girl, flashing his searchlight through the shadows to pick out the color of her flying skirts. Always she eluded him.

Finally in his dream he had her cornered before a thicket of brambles. She had turned upon him with snapping eyes and defiant fists.

He leaped forward to seize her, forcibly to bring her back to a safer path, but she was gone.

Kane struggled violently to free himself and woke to find one of the servants, an ex-soldier named Grimshaw, shaking him by the shoulders. The bright sunlight of early morning was streaming across his bed.

"What's the matter, buddy? What's the big idea?"

Kane had known this man in France. He had known him as a rather irresponsible chap, always in trouble, frequently under arrest and finally sent home suffering from a mild case of shell shock. He feared that Grimshaw had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Anything wrong, buddy?" he demanded, releasing himself and springing out of bed to face the trembling servant.

"Everything's wrong!" gasped the terrified man. He was pale and shaking, and his eyes were staring with panic. "The house has been robbed! Burglars got in last night. They must have cleaned up fifty thousand dollars' worth of jewelry."

"Good Lord! Burglars!" Kane was scrambling into his trousers and slippers and moving toward the door. "Dr. Ludlow will be wild!"

"You said something! He lost his diamond studs and cuff links besides all the money in his wallet. But that isn't the worst. They got away with Mrs. Anstruther's emeralds and Mrs. Foster's ruby necklace. Doc is sore as hell because his guests were robbed."

"And they made a clean get-away?"

"Absolutely! Nobody heard a sound."

By this time they were outside the door and Kane was seized with a sudden, horrifying fear. He darted to the guest room door that still remained ajar and looked in.

On the floor by the davenport was the silk dressing gown. The window leading to the balcony was wide open.

Gypsy was gone!

CHAPTER IV.

TO TABULATE THE LOOT.

THERE was a noise of excited voices from the foot of the stairs, men's voices in angry expostulation, women's voices, high pitched and hysterical.

Obeying an impulse that he could not explain, Kane snatched up the dressing gown in which he had enfolded the girl's body only a few hours ago and looked about for some place to stow it away.

Instead of that he abruptly thrust his arms into the sleeves and ran after Grimshaw who was half way downstairs. Kane's heart was beating violently and his mind was in a turmoil.

It was he who had brought this unpleasant affair upon the house of his employer.

His folly!

Because a common little creature of the gutter, a companion of gangsters and rum-runners, had told him a pitiful story, he had fallen hard.

It was a plant! That girl had been sent out by the gang of criminals to effect an entrance into the Ludlow mansion.

Oh, what a fool he was! He had known that these wealthy guests of his employer carried jewelry and money in large amounts. And yet he had been so foolishly sentimental as to bring a stranger indoors where she could rummage the jewel cases at will or open the house to her pals.

As Kane reached the head of the stairs and started to join the knot of guests who were buzzing about Dr. Ludlow, the young man had decided to make a clean breast of his unfortunate and misplaced sympathy.

It would cost him his job, that position that he had worked so hard to get and that he had held only a week! It would expose him to humiliation and ridicule, perhaps something more serious. He might be charged with complicity in the theft. But Kane Ryder was no coward and was prepared to take hs medicine. He had faced worse things in the Argonne.

But as he slowly descended step by step, another thought struck him forcibly. "What if the girl were innocent!"

As he had seen her standing at bay in the woods, erect and proud, her little chin thrown up, her cheeks flushed and her dark eyes daring him to lay a finger on her, Kane could not believe that she was degraded.

A thief! That inviolate, high-spirited wood sprite! Impossible!

He decided to wait. He would say not a word about Gypsy O'Farrell until he had proof positive that the girl had stolen the jewels or had opened the window to her accomplices.

Possibly the jewels were not stolen at all. Perhaps they had been mislaid.

That wild hope was shattered instantly.

As Kane approached the angry and frightened week-end guests, he realized that the affair was even more serious than he thought.

"They nicked me for a cool thousand and some odd hundred." It was the drawling and cynical voice of Harry Thornton. "Fortunately my links and studs didn't amount to much, two or three hundred dollars will cover that loss."

Helene Foster was weeping like a spoiled child with a broken doll. "Oh, my rubies, my rubies! I'll never get over this as long as I live. I've been coaxing Jerry for that string of pigeon blood rubies for six months, and the first time I wear them away from home they are stolen."

The golden-haired, pink and white beauty wheeled upon Dr. Ludlow with her tear-stained face that was distorted with anger. "Why didn't you have a watchman to protect your guests? It was all your fault—"

"My dear Mrs. Foster!" The metallic voice of Dr. Ludlow sounded with a forced suavity. He was furious at having to apologize. "I *have* a watchman. Jenkins is a trustworthy man, or at least, I always thought so.

"I'm as hard hit as any of you," he added with a note of grievance in his voice. "My studs and links were easily worth five thousand dollars. Besides that I lost two or three scarf pins, good ones, too, and my wallet with about thirty-five hundred dollars."

The beautiful Mrs. Anstruther, stately and scornful in her full blown beauty, took him up with some sharpness: "That's a bagatelle compared to my loss. My flat cut emeralds alone cost forty thousand dollars and the rings, pearls and brooches must have run to fifteen or twenty thousand more." She shrugged her superb shoulders under the purple negligee that draped them and added with assumed carelessness:

"The reporters will headline it: 'Ex-Chorus Girl Loses Gems.' That's the perfectest hell of it! If you've ever been on the stage, all your stolen jewelry is credited to the press agent. An actress, if she wants sympathy, has to look in the dictionary."

"You have *my* sympathy!" It was the voice of Eunice Ludlow, who had joined the group in white negligee, looking very angelic in her pale blond beauty. "That darling little pearl necklace that dad gave me for my coming-out party has disappeared. It wasn't worth forty thousand dollars, but it meant a lot to me."

"You see," said her father irritably. "We've all been hard hit."

Jerry Foster, the broker, came bustling up at that moment. "What about it,

Ludlow? Any trace of those scoundrels? I suppose you've phoned for the police?"

"Of course. I telephoned immediately. The officers will be here at any minute. They promised to send out a general alarm, notify the State troopers and constables all over the country."

"That's the stuff! That's quick work! If those fellows are on to their jobs they'll pick up the gang before they get rid of the loot. I'm not worried at losing my roll, but if my pet lion cub don't get her rubies back there's going to be hell to pay. I'll never hear the last of it. I just met Van Alstyne in the hall. His wife is tearing her hair at the loss of her sapphire bracelet."

"Where is Major Fester?" asked Thornton abruptly, in his cool, well-bred drawl. "Has the army reported heavy losses?"

"By George, where is the major?" exclaimed Dr. Ludlow. "Grimshaw! Ryder! Have either of you seen the major?"

For the first time that morning Ryder looked into the steel-gray eyes of his employer, noted the out-thrust jaw under the bristling red beard trimmed to a point, took in the harsh, resolute features, observed the clenched fists and the muscular build of the surgeon, and thought to himself: "There's a tough proposition to go up against." But he answered calmly: "No, sir; I haven't seen the major this morning."

Grimshaw, the ex-service men, Riggs, the butler, and all the guests and servants likewise declared that they had seen nothing of the major.

"Run up to his room, Grimshaw, and see if he's there," directed Dr. Ludlow.

"No, sir; he's not there," said Riggs, the butler. "I looked in his room already, sir, and Major Fester is not there."

"Perhaps he's out looking for some trace of the thieves," replied Ludlow. "Maybe he's out helping Jenkins and the outside man, looking for footprints and other clews."

"Very likely, sir. The major's clothes were not in his room, and it's very strange, sir." The servant hesitated. "But—but—"

Dr. Ludlow wheeled upon him. "But what? Spit it out, man. What's the matter with you?" His voice was like a snarl, and yellow teeth showed under his bristling beard as he glared at the startled butler.

"I was going to say, sir, that I thought it was queer—the major's bed hasn't been slept in!"

CHAPTER V.

WANTED, A SCAPEGOAT.

MAJOR Fester had disappeared. His bed had not been slept in. Significant glances were interchanged at this bit of news. Eyebrows were raised. There was a hissing sound of suppressed gasps and whispers.

Major Fester, in spite of his rank and the prestige of his war medals and good family connections, was not a popular man. He had retired from the army some time after the armistice with less glory than was due to a man with his undoubted courage. For the major had proved his reckless disregard of danger on the Mexican border, where he had dealt out ruthless justice to bandits.

Even before he went to France he was known as hard-boiled. Then on the other side he had given the Kaiser's men good cause to fear him. Unfortunately he treated his own men with the same brutal savagery that he showed the enemy. And because of his unpopularity among the rank and file, Major Fester had been "promoted" to the command of a military prison near Paris.

More than one private in his own regiment, so it was rumored, had gritted his teeth and sworn under his breath that he would shoot that low-down skunk in the back.

Perhaps it was the promotion to the job of breaking the spirit of the A. W. O. L.'s that had saved the major's life. Or perhaps the outraged boys in khaki were only blowing off steam.

Among the wealthy guests in the Ludlow home there appeared to be no reason why the major's brutality toward the enlisted men should make him unpopular. *They* had not suffered from his acts. To-

ward people of their class he was always extremely deferential, although there was a trace of cynicism in his thin-lipped smile, a hint of savagery in the narrowed, greenish eyes. But he was a good dancer, a man who could turn a neat compliment to a lady, or in the company of his fellows sit out the longest night over cards, chips, and whisky.

On the face of it, it was hard to say why all these week-end guests should have exchanged looks and whispers as soon as they learned that Major Fester was missing.

"Was his room disturbed by the burglars? Do you know whether the major lost anything?" asked Harry Thornton turning to Riggs.

"That I cannot say, sir."

"Grimshaw, you go outside and hunt up Jenkins. Find out whether Major Fester has been helping to look over the grounds," directed Dr. Ludlow.

Grimshaw obeyed. As the door closed behind him, Jerry Foster remarked: There's one man who wouldn't be sorry if the major had got in bad."

"How do you mean, 'in bad'?" asked Dr. Ludlow harshly. "Certainly you don't insinuate—"

"Not at all—not at all! I mean that if the burglars had knocked the major on the head or something like that, this man Grimshaw would be the last to go into mourning. He was a prisoner in Fester's little hell-hole. I understand he had a rough time of it."

"Did the major know that his former prisoner was in the same house with him?" asked Dr. Ludlow.

"Possibly. If he knew, he didn't care. Even if Fester believed that Grimshaw had taken service where he could run across his old enemy, the major would just laugh it off. He is absolutely fearless."

"Well, the war's over now," said Harry Thornton. "I'm not interested in ancient history. What I want to know is, how we are going to run down those crooks who made such a clean-up. Did anybody find a trace of them? Didn't anybody hear anything—or see anything—during the night?"

"I've not had time to question all the servants, but so far nobody has reported hearing or seeing anything suspicious. The servants were all asleep."

"What about the watchman?"

"Jenkins swore that he was on guard all night, but saw absolutely nothing."

"Damn mysterious!" commented Thornton.

"What a bunch of sound sleepers! Your guests all have a clear conscience, doctor."

But Ludlow suddenly whirled on his secretary. "Look here, Ryder—you came in late, didn't you? Was there anything suspicious about the place when you came in?"

Kane felt the color rise to his cheeks. He knew there was something extremely suspicious in the act of kindness that he had done, admitting a little tough from Hell's Kitchen into the mansion.

"No, sir; I didn't see anything out of the way," he replied.

"What time did you get in?"

"About half past three, sir."

"And there was no one around?"

"No, sir; not a soul. Jenkins may have been at the rear of the house. Certainly he wasn't in front when I came in. The place was all dark and quiet, and I went to bed."

"H-m!" The doctor looked thoughtful for a moment, then shot a sudden question: "Did *you* lose anything, Ryder?"

At this the young man smiled. "I'd be poor pickings for a burglar," he replied. "I don't believe they would bother carrying it away."

As Kane spoke he caught the glance of Eunice Ludlow and flushed perceptibly. In that frank declaration of his poverty he had placed himself so definitely outside her class. The heiress of Dr. Ludlow's millions must have felt humiliated at the thought that this young man whom she cared for was not worth a burglar's attention.

Eunice noticed his blush of embarrassment and set it down to his confession of poverty before all these wealthy guests. As a matter of fact, the young man's thoughts had shifted to a different subject:

"Whew! If Eunice only knew about Gypsy O'Farrell! If she had seen me bring that girl into the house, I could never convince her that I was not in love with that little wild cat."

CHAPTER VI.

THE GET-AWAY.

"YOU don't object to being searched, I suppose."

The question was thrown in the young man's face by his employer. On the doctor's countenance was an expression that was dangerously like a sneer, and Kane stiffened under the insult.

Yet he retained his presence of mind, although it cost an effort to choke down a hot reply. He threw back his head proudly, for he felt the eyes of Eunice were upon him with sympathy.

The others looked on with surprise as he retorted coolly:

"Certainly I don't object to being searched. I'm game if the rest are."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Go through my pockets. Look in my trunk. If the other gentlemen can stand being searched, I guess it takes the sting out of it. Go ahead and search us all."

The women gasped at this "insolence" from one of a lower class. The men looked embarrassed and uneasy, not knowing what to say.

Only Harry Thornton laughed shortly. "The kid's all right. Here, I'll start the ball rolling." He began pulling his pockets inside out, disclosing small change, keys, and a pocket knife.

"Reading letters is barred—I want that understood," he announced as he slipped a couple of envelopes back into his pocket with feigned alarm.

"I didn't mean to include my guests. I meant only the servants and other employees," snapped the doctor with a vicious look at Kane.

There was a sharp snarling of motor horns outside. Two cars full of officers and detectives had arrived, and a moment later Dr. Ludlow was telling the story of the burglary to Lieutenant Kearney.

The detective was a heavy-set, red-faced man with a determined mouth under a tightly curled black mustache. His manner was curt, aggressive, and military, in contrast to the unassuming civilian garb which might have been chosen to make him inconspicuous in a crowd.

"Of course, everybody will be searched," he said shortly. "Sorry—it's a matter of form. We'll have to have the name and address of everybody in the house. We'll have to question and search them and go through the place with a fine-tooth comb. Never know in these gem robberies whether it's an inside job."

Under Kearney's rapid instructions, Sergeant O'Conner and the other detectives working under him got on the job. The servants were questioned by some, and the house and grounds explored by others.

Meanwhile, Kearney had sent for Jenkins, the watchman. He appeared, a stoutish, elderly man with a walrus mustache, blowing and puffing from his exertions. Without waiting for the detective's questioning, he began: "I've found footprints. We've got something to go on. An open window, footprints in the shrubbery, and this."

He showed a small fragment of a woolen fabric, a tatter torn from some garment. "This here was caught in a barberry bush near the south balcony," he explained.

Kearney took the scrap in his thick fingers and examined it critically. The fragment was small, but it showed a pattern of red and green threads.

"Huh! Looks like a bit of a woman's skirt," he remarked.

Kane felt his heart stand still. It was undoubtedly a bit of Gypsy's plaid that the detective held in his hand. Would they be able to pin that crime on the girl by such evidence?

"Let's have a look at those footprints," said Kearney.

"By jiminy, that's it!" exclaimed the watchman. "I thought those footprints must be a woman's."

Kearney and the watchman made for the shrubbery, and Kane followed them at a little distance.

While the investigators were stooping

over the footprints Dr. Ludlow appeared on the balcony above them.

"Here's where the burglars escaped," he announced. "The window of the guest room was wide open. And I just found this on the balcony."

"What did you find?" asked Kearney.

"This cuff link. Catch!" Dr. Ludlow tossed down the trinket. "I think it belongs to Mr. Thornton."

Kearney caught it and dropped it into his pocket after a hasty glance.

"It doesn't amount to much," he said. "Not valuable, but it shows where the crooks made their get-away."

He called one of his assistants. "Billy, see that nobody makes fresh tracks about here, and have a plaster cast made of these two sharpest footprints. I'm going upstairs."

Kane was about to follow him, when a thought struck him suddenly. He had left the yellow roadster in the driveway before the house the night before. Now, he remembered, it was no longer there.

"Jenkins," he said, "did you see the yellow roadster here this morning?"

"No, Mr. Ryder. It wasn't anywhere around, not that I know of."

Kane ran to the driveway to look for its tracks. He was sure that he could pick out the mark of the disk pattern on the tires.

As he started down the driveway that curved toward the gate, one of the detectives called:

"Hey, young fellow, where you going?"

"I am looking for the track of the car I drove. I think it was stolen."

"You can't leave the place. Nobody can go without Kearney's permission."

"You mean we are all under suspicion?"

"Take it any way you like. You can't go away from here."

"But, listen, officer. This is a lead. We may be on the right track. What about it? I'll follow the trail of the car—and you come along to watch me."

The officer, Dan Murphy, a new man on the job, agreed to this. Near the gate the ground was soft, and sure enough Kane picked up the disk pattern of the roadster's tires.

"Great Scott!" he cried. "The guy who drove this must have been drunk! See where the car almost hit the gate!"

The two men looked at the swerving track, and then at a scratch on the stone post.

"That's where the fender scraped," said Kane.

"That crook was a pretty cheesy driver, I'll say!" retorted Murphy.

At that instant Kane had a mental picture of the car lurching forward and swerving down the driveway, piloted by a terrified girl.

"Of course!" he thought. "She had wrenched her ankle. She *had* to drive away. What a game little kid!"

CHAPTER VII.

A SCAPEGOAT FOUND.

OUTSIDE the gate the tracks continued a lurching, zigzag course, but as Kane and Murphy were about to follow them an officer came running down the driveway from the house. "Hey, come back, you!" he shouted to Ryder. "Lieutenant Kearney wants to talk to you. Shake a leg now!"

Kane found the detective in Dr. Ludlow's office, knitting his brows over the first inventory of the loss. It was a big haul. Between fifty and seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of jewelry and money had been taken, and Kearney felt that this was a chance to make a name for himself.

"Look here, young fellow," he said to Ryder, "Dr. Ludlow says you were the last man to come in. Now, watch your step and give me a straight answer, for I want to get the facts right. What time did you get here last night?"

"About half past three."

"Huh! About half past three. What were you doing out so late?"

"Dr. Ludlow sent me in to New York on business—I'm his secretary—and told me that I could have the rest of the evening off. I went to a show and afterward had supper."

"Give me the names of the people you were with."

"I was alone."

While Kane was not a habitual liar, something warned him that the fact that he had played cards and taken a number of cocktails might be held against him.

"You didn't meet anybody and didn't pick up any one?"

"Not a soul. I don't make friends easily."

"And you came home alone?"

"Of course."

"What about the footprints on the driveway to the front door?" The question was hurled at Kane with terrifying violence.

"I don't know of any footprints, sir."

"You don't, hey? Well, we found tracks leading to the front steps that correspond with the footprints found in the shrubbery. It looks to me like a case for a special investigation. I've got a strong hunch that you know more about the young woman who was in with this bunch of crooks than you are willing to admit. My advice to you is to come clean. Tell all you know."

"I've told you all I know: I got home at three thirty, didn't see a soul about the place, and went right to bed."

"Your room is next to the one with the open window. Do you mean to say that you didn't hear that window being opened? You slept so sound that burglars were running around in the next room and you did not notice anything?"

Kane remembered well enough that he had heard a suspicious sound during the night, but having decided to protect Gypsy O'Farrell until there was some evidence of her guilt, he resolved to stick to his story.

"I didn't hear a thing," he said. "I was asleep."

Dr. Ludlow scowled at the young man as if he would wring the truth from him by terror, but Kane met his eye boldly.

"*Nobody* heard anything suspicious. I was not the only sound sleeper."

Kearney was about to make a violent retort, when the door of the doctor's office was thrust open hastily and Dan Murphy entered.

"What the hell—" began the lieutenant, but the terror in Murphy's face checked him.

The new man was unused to scenes of violence, and what he had witnessed had unnerved him.

"They found Major Fester," he gasped. "Hurry up, lieutenant; this is worse than burglary. It's a murder!"

Dr. Ludlow and the detective started to their feet in horror at this news and, followed by Kane, they hastened after Murphy into the hall.

A little knot of detectives and guests were crowded around the open door of a closet under the stairs. As Kearney thrust them aside there was disclosed a figure at once grotesque and ghastly.

Major Fester's body, half standing, half leaning against some trunks and boxes, was facing them with a horrible grin on his pallid face, his eyes wide open but sightless. His figure was sprawling in the ungainly fashion of a stuffed manikin, and the dinner jacket and formal white shirt made his grotesque pose seem even more ghastly.

Dr. Ludlow sprang forward, laid his hands on the body, and dragged it into the hallway.

"Stand back, everybody!" he said. "Something may be done to revive him." But the touch of that cold and clammy flesh and the rigidity of the limbs told him at once that Major Fester was beyond hope.

The man had been dead for hours. Between his shoulders was the small slash where a blade had entered, but there was only a little blood.

Murphy turned a pocket flash light into the dark closet and gave vent to a long whistle.

"Here's what done it, lieutenant," he said.

He held out a long, thin Japanese knife, a razor-edged weapon with a heavy ivory handle, and a blade reddened with blood.

Kearney seized it, and after a hasty inspection wrapped it carefully in a piece of paper from the floor of the closet.

"There will be finger-prints on that," he said. "Do you know anything about this knife?" He turned sharply to Ludlow.

"Yes. It was on my desk in the office. I used it for a paper knife." The doctor

arose from his examination of Major Fester's body. His face was very grave and stern. "It looks to me as if Major Fester had been surprised by the burglar," he said. "Perhaps the criminal was rummaging the desk in my office when the major heard a noise and interrupted him. The major paid for his bravery with his life. Poor fellow!"

"Was anything stolen from your office?"

"I don't know. I haven't had time to look. I kept some currency and a few checks in one of the drawers of the desk."

"Let's have a look," said Kearney.

They went back to the office, which was just a few steps down the hall, and the keen eye of the detective swept the room.

"No sign of a struggle," he said. "Everything seems to be in order."

He flipped open the drawer of the flat-topped desk, but the papers were lying flat and undisturbed.

"Doesn't look as if they had looted your desk after all!"

Dr. Ludlow opened a small drawer, and replied: "Here's where I kept my money. As you see, it's gone!"

"Looks as if that thief knew just where to look," observed Detective Kearney as he searched the floor, the furniture and the top of the desk for marks of blood. Nothing!

"It doesn't look as if the killing was done in this room. What's that on the shelf?" The detective pointed to some heavy jars containing mysterious objects, and said: "What's that?"

"Surgical specimens," replied Dr. Ludlow.

"What's in this closet?"

"Look for yourself," replied the surgeon, and swung open the door.

Kearney jumped back with a gasping oath, for he stood face to face with a grinning skeleton whose limbs had been set in a jigging motion by the sudden opening of the door.

Disgusted at his own alarm, Lieutenant Kearney shut the door upon the object. He laughed a bit unsteadily.

"You should have told me you kept a skeleton in there," he said. "I never could bear the sight of them things. Not since I was a kid and my old woman scared me with stories of ghosts and graveyards."

The doctor smiled. "A surgeon forgets that there is anything terrifying in a skeleton. It's part of the ordinary equipment in our profession."

"Got anything else in the closet?"

"Just a few anatomical specimens and some old medical books."

"Huh!" Kearney turned away irresolutely, and at that instant there was a violent uproar in the hall. A man's voice, high-pitched and hysterical, was shouting at the top of his lungs.

Other voices, deep-toned and grumbling, were raised in anger, and farther down the hall some of the women had begun to scream.

"What's all this?" cried Kearney, flinging open the door to the hall.

Three officers were struggling determinedly with Grimshaw, the manservant, who was frantically cursing and writhing in their grasp.

The ex-service man's eyes were staring like a maniac's, his face was pale and distorted, and there was foam at the corners of his mouth.

"The poor guy's nutty!" explained Dan Murphy. "He's gone bats?"

"How's that?"

"The minute he seen this here stiff he began to rave and yell something fierce."

"What did he say?"

"It was wild. He wanted to stamp on the dead man's face."

"What?"

Even the hardened Lieutenant Kearney was aghast at this attempted outrage.

But the voice of Grimshaw, raving like a crazy man, broke out afresh.

"You got what was coming to you, you dirty skunk! God! This is a happy day for me! You sure got what was coming to you, you butcher!"

Kearney shot a questioning look at Dr. Ludlow.

"The poor fellow was shell-shocked," said the surgeon, and he added in a low voice: "I understand that Grimshaw was in the military prison under Major Fester."

"O-ho!" Kearney barked a command at the detectives: "Slip the bracelets on that guy!"

"It was you that killed the major!" snarled Lieutenant Kearney, boring into Grimshaw with his fierce eyes.

The prisoner raised his manacled hands to clutch at his head. "Did I do that?" he cried hoarsely, staring down at the dead man's face. "Many a time I've dreamed of it. Did I really kill him at last?"

"Of course you did! You stuck him in the back with a knife! You stabbed him and locked his body in a closet. That's the truth, isn't it?"

"Yes—no! Honest, I can't remember if I done it!" Grimshaw was still in a daze.

"He said 'yes.' You heard him say 'yes' the first time!" Kearney's voice was triumphant.

To Grimshaw he continued in tones heavy with authority: "We've got the goods on you. You are under arrest for the murder of Major Fester!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DEDUCTION.

"GET him out of here! Lock him up!" directed Kearney.

Raving and cursing incoherently, Grimshaw was led away. Outside the noise grew less, as the furious man was hustled into a car. Finally it drove away and all was still.

Kearney telephoned for the coroner and sat thinking with knitted brows.

"I've got a hunch on this case," he said. "My theory is that Grimshaw was looting the house, when the major caught him at it. Grimshaw was in with a gang, as the open window shows, but the others were not in the room, or there would have been a struggle."

"Yes. Go on."

"When Grimshaw was caught by this man, who had given him some rough treatment in prison, there was not even an argument. Grimshaw grabbed the knife, stuck it into him, shoved the body in the closet, and then stood guard till his pals got away. That's my theory of the crime."

"It sounds plausible," answered Dr. Ludlow. "I believe you are right!"

Sergeant O'Conner, who had been left with the body, came in at this moment. "I've searched the corpse, sir," he announced. "This is what was in the pockets."

The officer dumped a watch, keys, some change, a memorandum book and a few odds and ends on the desk.

Kearney examined them with somber eyes, seeing little there of any consequence to the case.

But Dr. Ludlow gave an astonished gasp. "Look here!" With a forefinger he sorted out a small object from the little heap.

It was a single cuff link, a black enameled surface with a small pearl in the center.

With a grunt of surprise the detective dived into his pocket and brought out the link that was found outside the open window.

It matched. It was the mate of Harry Thornton's stolen link.

"Look here, O'Conner," asked the doctor in a dismayed voice, "you found this in the pocket of Major Fester?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You're sure it was not on the floor by the body?"

"No, sir. It was in the vest pocket. I noticed particularly, sir."

Kearney whistled. "This is a new angle to the situation, doctor. Here is one of your guests found dead with part of the loot in his pocket. What do you make of that?"

"I could hardly believe such a thing of Major Fester. I can't understand it at all."

"I can. It looks to me like a definite lead. Suppose Fester was in with a gang of crooks, let them into the house, helped them collect the loot?"

"Don't talk like that without proof, lieutenant. The major was my guest. He was a man of high reputation—and what reason did he have to steal? He had plenty of money."

"*Did* he? How did he get it?"

"Well, he had a good salary, for one thing. He was a special investigator of some sort—in government service."

"He'd need a whale of a salary to run

with your guests. I don't believe he could do it without money—big money. I'm going to look into his affairs."

"Just what is your theory?"

"I think he was in with a gang of gem robbers. There's been a lot of this thing going on. I think he was quarreling over the loot, and one of the gang knifed him."

"Then what about Grimshaw? You think he did not kill the major?"

"Why not? Grimshaw could have been in the gang. Like as not he was. Yes, I think it's very likely Grimshaw used the knife, but it may have been for some reason more than revenge. I'll put the screws on that lad and get the truth out of him."

Kane Ryder, standing back in the corner of the office, breathed a sigh of relief. Anyway, suspicion was turning away from him. Also there was no present attempt to pin this greater crime on the wearer of the plaid skirt.

When the lesser crime of robbery had developed into the greater crime of the murder, Kane's doubts were dispelled. He felt positive that this hard fighting, hard swearing, but altogether sportsmanlike little kid could not be implicated in such an affair. To stab a man in the back, hide his body and sneak away—that was an act of which Gypsy O'Farrell could not be capable. He would have taken his oath on that.

Still, he felt an overpowering impulse to see the girl, to warn her of her danger, and at the same time to get the truth out of her. If, by any mischance, she had been unfortunate enough to get mixed up with a gang of burglars, he was going to help her get out of their clutches and go straight in the future.

His thoughts about her were confused; now, regarding her as an innocent victim of circumstances, and again as a young girl who had taken the first step in the ways of crime, but who could be reclaimed.

He decided to follow the trail of that missing roadster as far as possible. That was a clew of which he had said nothing and which had been overlooked by Dan Murphy in the excitement of the murder.

"If that's all you want with me, lieutenant, I would like to go up and dress," he remarked.

Kearney scowled at him, apparently having forgotten his existence.

"All right! That's all for the present."

As the door shut behind the young man, Dr. Ludlow asked:

"How about Ryder? Have you dismissed him entirely from the case?"

"Dismissed nothing! Like as not he's tangled up in this bunch, though I haven't got the goods on him yet."

"Are you letting him slip out of sight?"

"Don't you think it for a minute! I tipped off Murphy to keep an eye on that young fellow. If Ryder thinks that he is not suspected he is likely to fall into a trap. I'll just let him go ahead for the present and see which road he takes."

As Kane left the room his first move was to run upstairs and exchange the dressing gown and other scanty attire for a suit of tweeds. Then he ran downstairs and swung along the driveway toward the gate where he had seen the wheel tracks that had betrayed such reckless driving.

On the way he was hailed by Dan Murphy. "Are you still trailing that mystery car?" asked the young detective.

"I thought I'd see how far it's gone," Kane's voice was not inviting, but Murphy ignored that.

"I'll be steppin' along with you, if you don't mind. I'm interested to see how far that crazy son-of-a-gun got. I bet he hit a tree before he drove a quarter of a mile."

The two men passed out of the lodge gate and started down the road which was muddy enough to show them the serpentine trail with distinctness. It cut across the little ruts formed by the succession of steady-going cars and missed the ditch to the left and then to the right with astonishing luck.

Murphy began to laugh. "Great snakes!" he exclaimed. "That guy must have been full of hop! He sure put the old buggy through circus stunts."

But Kane was in no laughing mood. They were approaching a sweeping curve with a hillside above and a deep ravine below, in whose depths a streamlet gushed and murmured on its way to the Hudson.

"Holy Mother!" ejaculated Murphy. "Here's the place!"

Kane rushed forward, his heart thumping. He stood at the edge of the road where the deep ruts showed that the machine had plowed through the loose soil and rolled over and over through the brush.

"There it is!" cried Murphy, and pointed to a splash of yellow far down in the depths of the ravine.

Kane had a glimpse of smashed spokes and wheels in the air, and plunged down hill, careless of scratches and bruises. He felt as if his heart were being wrenched asunder; as if the dearest thing in life had been taken from him! He could not bear the thought of what he might find beneath that wrecked car.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRUANT.

THE crumpled car was a horrible sight. The yellow roadster all scarred and battered by its plunge down the ravine had little resemblance to the trim and jaunty machine that Kane had piloted the night before. One of the wheels that stuck up so helplessly into the air had lost its rim and tire and the jagged spokes protruded like broken teeth.

Kane took in these details with a sickening sense of disaster, as he scrambled closer to the wreck that was washed by the waters of the little stream.

There was no sign of Gypsy.

Stooping low he peered under the upturned body, but saw only torn cushions and a smashed steering wheel. The mangled body of the girl, that he dreaded to find, was not there.

With a great gasp of returning hope, Kane saw that there were no blood stains. Probably the girl had saved herself by jumping out in the nick of time, and from the bottom of his heart he sent up a prayer of thanksgiving.

As he started to pick his way down the stream bed to look for any traces of Gypsy, there was the sound of a rolling body and frantic curses from the slope above.

Kane could barely catch a glimpse of the heavy form of Dan Murphy. The officer had lost his temper if nothing worse.

"What's the trouble?" called Kane. And he added: "There's nobody under the car!"

"I should worry about that drunken fool," called the agonized voice of Murphy. "I caught my foot in a root and pretty nearly twisted it off."

"Stay where you are, Murphy. I'll be up in a little while and help you get back to the house."

"You're coming back now! I've got orders not to let you out of my sight."

"You have? Well, then you're out of luck." Kane's quick eye had just caught the imprint of a little heel pointing downstream and he was not to be recalled so easily.

"I'll come back in a little while," he shouted over his shoulder.

"Either you come back now, or I'll put a hole through you!" Murphy's voice was harsh with pain and anger. "Even if I'm crippled, my gun's in good order."

For answer Kane ducked and started downstream at top speed. To his amazement the sound of four or five shots rang out abruptly and he could hear the bullets cutting the leaves overhead. It had never occurred to him that the officer would really shoot with so little reason.

He was out of range in no time and safe for the present, at least. Then Kane slowed up, watching for footprints, and his search was rewarded by an occasional mark in the soft earth.

Some instinct of the hunted caused him to plant his own foot squarely in each of those little heel prints as he passed over it, so that the girl's track was obliterated.

Far behind him the rumble of Murphy's curses died away, and presently that unlucky man was forgotten in the greater interest of searching for that untamed girl of the woods.

He followed the creek for at least a mile before the footprints turned up the opposite bank, and only a trail through tall grass and brush showed him where some one had passed over the ridge.

Presently he was looking down over the Hudson and directly below him was the broad path of the aqueduct that parallels the river for miles.

It was a favorite footpath for hikers, and the boy wondered whether Gypsy would be imprudent enough to take that trail in her flight.

It would be decidedly dangerous now that the fragment of her skirt had been found. Word would have been telephoned to all the constables and State troopers, to be on the lookout for a girl with a red and green plaid skirt.

Kane wondered whether Gypsy would be apt to set out afoot to New York.

No! She had decided that she would be in danger if she went back to her old home! He started along the aqueduct in the opposite direction, hoping against hope that he might catch sight of that lithe, jaunty figure in the red and green skirt.

Occasionally he had a glimpse of the Hudson through the trees, and all at once near a small town built on the river bank, he stopped short at sight of a swarm of ragged urchins, yelling, screaming and laughing at the top of their voices.

The boys were running up a narrow trail leading from the Hudson, and when Kane stopped to find out why they were so excited, he spied a strange apparition leaping and scrambling through the bushes, and occasionally stopping to scream defiance at the pursuing gang.

Kane had to smile at this freak in spite of his anxiety. It was a half grown boy who seemed to be wrapped up in sheets of newspaper that were tied to him by bits of rope and string.

"What the deuce is this? Some new kind of high school hazing?" thought Kane. "This is certainly rough stuff!" For at that moment one of the pursuing gang let fly a clod of dirt that hit the victim in the small of the back, and brought out a yell of fury.

The butt of this wild humor evidently saw nothing funny in it. He picked up stones and let drive at the gang with all his force, then, pelted by a volley of pebbles and little sticks that started scraps of paper flying from his flimsy costume, he turned and fled, darting across the aqueduct and down through the woods with the gang at his heels.

The echo of their hoots and catcalls died away and Kane thought to himself: "What ruffians these kids are! The school ought to put a stop to this hazing business. Too dangerous! That poor kid may catch cold and come down with pneumonia."

Then his mind turned to Gypsy again and he pushed on, watching for some sign of the girl.

Presently the aqueduct path entered the village, and where it crossed the main street, Kane decided to turn aside and make inquiries.

It was a town of only one long street, lined with little shops and a sprinkling of gas stations.

Suddenly a half block away he saw Gypsy. She was standing at the curb and if she had not been facing him he would not have guessed who it was. For Gypsy had shed her skirts and in some mysterious way had gained possession of a striped sweater, faded overalls, heavy shoes and a big, disreputable looking cap.

Her face was toward him so that he recognized her cheerful grin instantly, but she was not looking at him. She was signaling to passing automobiles for a lift, jerking her thumb over her shoulder as she smiled confidently into the drivers' faces.

Just at the instant he sighted her, a big yellow truck slowed down in response to her friendly impudence, and like a flash Gypsy had scrambled up beside the driver and the machine was on its way with a rumble of heavy wheels and a belching of blue smoke.

"Gypsy! Gypsy!" shouted the youth. "Hey, wait a minute! I want to talk to you!" But she could not have heard him, for the clumsy machine was thumping along toward Albany as fast as the law allowed.

Kane cursed his slowness. He should have pushed right along instead of stopping to look at those school boys back on the aqueduct. At the sight of Gypsy he should have made a quick sprint, perhaps he could have caught up with the truck.

But now that he had seen her, he was not going to let her get away. That was certain!

Oh, for a taxi! But in that small village there was no taxi in sight.

Then he had an idea. Imitating Gypsy he stood at the curb and signaled the touring cars that came by, but in a more determined fashion. He put out his flat hand like an officer stopping the traffic. And sure enough the third car did haul up short and Kane climbed in beside the driver with a businesslike air.

"I've got to commandeer your car!" he said curtly. "I'm a truant officer. There's a boy that has given me the slip. He's in that yellow truck that passed a couple of minutes ago. It's nothing serious, but I've got to bring that young rascal back to school and show him that he can't play hookey and get away with it."

"That's the way to talk!" said the driver, a fat man with pop eyes. "I've got two kids myself. They need a firm hand, the young devils!"

"You said something! You wouldn't believe it if I'd tell you, the tricks those kids are up to to get out of school."

"You can't tell me nothin' about the cussedness of children. Mine are as wild as they make them. Their mother can't do a thing with them!"

"No, women are too easy. It takes a man to put the fear of God into them."

"Ain't it so! I'll broadcast it!"

The driver was stepping on the gas and already the yellow truck was in sight at the bend of the road.

"That's it!" exclaimed Kane. "Run up ahead of that truck and I'll have my hands on that young rascal in no time."

But at that moment Gypsy looked back from the car ahead. Kane saw a startled expression on the impish face of the gamin. Immediately the yellow truck put on speed. It was almost lost in the blue cloud that was belching from its exhaust.

It was going to be a chase!

CHAPTER X.

OVERTAKEN.

"CAN you beat that!" The pop-eyed driver looked at Kane with an incredulous smile. "Does that bonehead think he can put up a race? That freight car against my twin eight?"

He set his foot on the accelerator with such decision that the figures in the speedometer began to dance merrily.

"That's the stuff!" said Kane. Then in the mirror on the fender he saw a motorcycle officer burning up the road. "Better take it easy!" he cautioned. "I don't want you fined on my account."

"Hell! He wouldn't do nothin'," said the pop-eyed man. "I bet you ten dollars I can run away from his motorcycle."

"Don't do anything rash."

"I tell you I'm tickled to death at the chance. If that guy does overhaul us, show him your badge. He can't do anything when you've commandeered the car! You're a cop same as him, ain't you?"

There was nothing Kane wanted to avoid more than an interview with a cop at that moment. Both for his own sake and Gypsy's, it would be a bad time to explain matters.

As the car shot past the yellow truck, with the motorcycle still trailing them, Kane said decisively and with a stern gaze at his companion: "I won't stand for any breaking of the speed laws. It's my duty to enforce the laws, not to break them—"

His noble sentiment was cut short, for at that instant the truck driver put on the brakes and a slight figure, active as a monkey in its baggy garments, leaped from the machine, darted across the road and vaulted the fence of some millionaire's estate.

Kane was in pursuit before Gypsy had touched the ground. He was glad to be out of there, he felt perfectly willing to let the motorist square things with the speed cop.

Taking the fence in a flying leap, he was pelting through the bushes after the girl, who showed wonderful ability as a sprinter. In a few minutes all sight and sound of the motor road were lost.

Kane ceased to worry about possible pursuers and settled down to a stiff chase. He was going to corner that young devil! He was going to make her tell him why she had run away. If she was innocent he was going to convince her that he was her friend and help her make a get-away.

If she were guilty—if she had been

mixed up in that robbery—but Kane refused to accept that theory for a minute. No! She simply could not be that sort.

His jaws were clenched, he was breathing hard through his nostrils. He was following that fleeing figure with grim determination.

Then all of a sudden the end came. They had reached the river side of the estate. Gypsy scrambled over the fence, ran across the railroad tracks and out to a little point of sand, overgrown with scrub willows and ending in a half rotten bulkhead. At the end of this structure she turned to face him, panting and with fists doubled up for defense.

But Kane did not try to rush her. Instead of that he sat down in the sand at a distance of about thirty feet from the girl and near the crumbling boards that were the only way back, and with a careless glance in her direction, pulled out his cigarette case and lighted up.

He mopped the moisture from his forehead, sprawled back comfortably and blew a cloud of tobacco smoke into the still air. Apparently he had settled down to enjoy the river view.

Before this indifference the girl's defiant fists appeared a little exaggerated. Her aggressiveness wilted. She looked at him uncertainly for a moment, then finally said in a plaintive voice:

"Why in hell can't you leave me alone!"

Kane looked at her with elaborately affected surprise. "Why, hello, Gypsy!" he said. "How did you get here?"

"What do you want to chase me all the time for?"

"I chase you! Nonsense! Why should you run away from me? You know I'm your friend."

The girl stamped her foot in rage. "Then get out of my way and let me go by!" she exclaimed.

Kane smiled at her, a cool and masterful smile. "Don't be absurd! You know very well I won't lay hands on you if you want to go by. Come over here, I want to talk to you."

Fascinated by his nonchalant manner, the girl approached slowly, half afraid of this strange type of man, so different from her rough and ready friends from Hell's Kitchen.

"Honest? You won't try to grab me?" she asked.

"Why should I? Listen, Gypsy, I want to help you. Come here and sit down. Tell me, first of all, for the love of Mike, where you got those togs!"

The girl squatted beside him and grinned with impish pleasure as she replied: "Lifted 'em! There was a bunch of kids in swimming and I sneaked up, grabbed what I wanted and made a clean get-away."

"How did you do it?"

"I traveled like a snake." And Gypsy made a wriggling motion to show how she had crawled through the bushes.

Kane laughed. "I wish you had seen how that poor kid went home. He did himself up in newspaper like a bundle from a Chinese laundry. It was a regular circus for his friends." And he told Gypsy about the unlucky swimmer who had been chased through the woods by his companions.

"You seem to think that's funny," he concluded. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Haven't you got any conscience?"

"Not when it comes to boys," declared Gypsy. "God! if you knew what I've had to put up with from boys you wouldn't blame me."

"Well, if you despise boys as much as that, why do you want to go around like one?"

"Why, it's like this! I dasn't go home. My old man runs a livery stable and he likes to keep the horse whip limber by using it on me when the horses ain't there. See?"

"Yes, go on!"

"So I just naturally decided to work my way up the river to Albany or Buffalo and get a job."

"You were going to hike to Albany?"

"Hitch hike! But I didn't want to chance it as a girl. Not after the rough stuff that Tige and Billy the Snitch pulled. So I just grabbed these duds like I told you, ditched my old ones under a brush pile, bought fifty cents' worth of haircut from a wop barber and everything was going fine until you began chasing me in that car."

Kane had purposely said nothing about the robbery, watching for her to betray herself if she had any knowledge of it. Now he told her briefly what had happened at the big house, of the robbery, the murder and the fact that the police had sent out a general alarm.

Her exclamation of horror convinced him that she was not implicated in the crime —either she was innocent or she was a magnificent actress.

"What made you leave like that?" he questioned. "What was the idea of sneaking out of the house in the middle of the night?"

"Honest, buddy, I was scared stiff! I must have had the feeling in my bones that dirty work was going on, for I was that nervous."

"Did you hear anything? See anything?"

"Did I? Listen! After you left me alone I must have dropped off to sleep, but pretty soon I was wide awake again —I don't know how it came, but there I was wide awake and I had a hunch that somebody was in the room."

"Was it one of the burglars? Did you see him?"

"I don't know who it was! It was just beginning to get a little bit light outside, too dark in the room to see much."

"Well, what did you see?"

"Something fishy! There was a man's figure moved past the couch where I was curled up. I could just see his shape against the window and you bet I held my breath, expecting to be nabbed in a strange house."

"Didn't you think I might have returned?"

"No, buddy, I knew it wasn't you. I had the sensation like it was a snake in the room. It was a heavier guy than you."

"What did he do?"

"He sneaked over to the window, opened the catch and lifted it without any noise. He moved so easy and kept so quiet he might have been a ghost. All I could hear was the window creaking a little when he raised it."

"And then?"

"Then I heard a little tinkle like something dropping on the roof. And then this big guy went back on tiptoe the way he came in. Not a sound! It was too much for me."

"What did you do?"

"I lay there shivering and shaking for awhile, wondering if he would come back and choke me or something. Then all of a sudden I got fed up with the place. I went through that window like I was shot out of a gun and got down into the garden, I don't know how, but I got there."

"Yes! And what then?"

"It was just beginning to be daylight. I started to cut across the lawn, but I knew I couldn't go far afoot. Then I caught sight of your snappy little car and thought I'd take a chance."

"Take a chance is right. You certainly traveled on both sides of the road at once."

Gypsy's voice took an injured tone. "Gee, what do you expect?" she cried. "It's almost the first time I ever run a car. The other times there was somebody alongside to grab the wheel when I got rattled. I thought I was doing pretty good for a new beginner!"

Suddenly they noticed a man crossing the railroad tracks and making straight toward them. He had a square, determined face, florid and sunburned, and an air of authority. At the sight of him the girl made as if to bolt, but Kane laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"It's a dick," she gasped. "I can smell those guys a mile off!"

"Don't worry, kid, sit tight!"

The stranger halted at a few paces and looked down upon the pair with a stern expression.

There was a few moments of silence, while Kane lighted a fresh cigarette and tossed the pack and a folder of matches to his companion. He was pleased to see that the girl struck a light and got her smoke going without a tremor.

Yet she was terrified. He was certain of it.

Suddenly the intruder spoke: "What are you bos hanging around here for? Don't you know this is railroad property!"

As they stared at him with surprise min-

gled with uneasiness, he added: "I've got a mind to run you in! You look like suspicious characters to me!"

CHAPTER XI.

SUBTERFUGE.

THE constable stared at them.

Kane had his reply ready: "I just ran up from New York. Had a day off from the office and took my kid brother for a hike."

The plainclothes man took in every detail of Kane's attire; the neat, well-cut tweeds, tan shoes and soft hat, and appeared satisfied.

"I guess it's all right," he said. "Have you been here long?"

"About half an hour. Why? Have a smoke?" Kane extended his cigarettes.

"Thanks! Have you seen anything of a woman—or a girl—in a red and green skirt?"

"Let's see. I'm not sure. What sort of a looking girl was she?"

"I don't know. All I was told was there was some kind of a girl bandit hiding out. She's in with a tough gang of house breakers. The description says a woman in a plaid skirt, red and green, wearing high-heeled shoes."

"By George!" exclaimed Kane. "Come to think of it, I did see a woman in that kind of an outfit legging it down the tracks. She was about forty years old and had red hair, and she was going it as if she had a date."

"She was headin' that way—toward Hastings?" The officer jumped to his feet, threw away his cigarette and started in that direction.

"Yeah! About twenty minutes ago. You can't miss her. She has a head of hair like a bunch of carrots. You could see that headlight a mile off."

As the detective started hot-foot in pursuit, Gypsy gave vent to a gasp of relief.

"What's the matter, girl?"

"Nothin' much! I was just worked up to killin' that guy!"

"What do you mean?"

Gypsy showed a jack knife with a long blade buried in the sand beside her. "I'd have stuck that bull, sure, if he'd tried to take me away!" she exclaimed.

"I believe you would, at that!"

"Lucky I didn't have to!" Then the girl chuckled softly. "Gosh, boy! You're a wonder! For plain and fancy lying, you've got the Hell's Kitchen boys beat six ways for Sunday!"

"Ssh!" said Kane warningly. "Not so loud!" He was too nervous from the narrow escape to see any humor in the situation

"All I can say is," continued Gypsy plaintively, "I'm sorry for the poor jane that you tell that she's your first and only sweetie. With such a liar, the poor girl won't have no chance!"

There was a touch of coquetry in her eyes and she gave him a sidewise look.

But Kane interrupted her harshly. "Cut it out now! Remember you're a boy!"

"Of course, I'm a boy!" There was indignation in Gypsy's tones. "Listen to me swear!" And she drew a long breath as if she were ready to sweep him off his feet with a gust of profanity.

"All right! All right! I'll take your word for it! Now listen, Gypsy! You say your father runs a livery stable."

The girl produced a pair of dice from her overalls pocket and carelessly flipped them as she answered.

"Yeah! He runs a cafeteria for horses, that's right."

"Did you hang around the stable much when you were there?"

"Come on you babies! Do your tricks for daddy—sure I did! It beat home sweet home all hollow!"

"Then you know something about horses?"

"I'll say I do! Take it from me, there's no guy in New York knows more about them than I do."

"Fine! Now, Dr. Ludlow has a big stable with some good saddle horses, but the stable man is getting old and fat and lazy. His idea of earning wages is to sit in the shade and smoke. About once an hour he gets up and moves his chair out of the sun, and that's his idea of a day's work."

"I get you! That's just like my old man."

"So what you've got to do is to make up to old Peter Wilkins—that's the stable man—tell him you're looking for a job, with pay no object, and if you work it right he'll take you on."

"That sounds pretty good!" Gypsy snapped her fingers as she threw the dice, then slipped them into her pocket.

"You won't make any money," continued Kane. "Just your keep and an odd dollar once in awhile, but that way you'll be near me until I can find something better for you. I work there."

"Gee! That's grand! Shall I tell Wilkins you sent me?"

"Not on your life! I'll come down and make your acquaintance after you get the job—maybe this evening."

"What's the big idea? Are you ashamed of me?" The girl's eyes flashed with sudden anger.

"Of course not!"

"Then why all this mystery?"

"It's like this, Gypsy. Nobody must ever guess that you are the girl that I took into the house last night. I'm trying to save you from being railroaded to the pen."

"You're a regular pal, I'll say!"

"But that isn't all—there's something very mysterious about this robbery and murder. Until the real criminals are found I'm going to be more or less under suspicion."

"*You?*"

"Yes. Just now they are trying to pin it on to Grimshaw, a shell-shocked ex-soldier. He might have done it, but I don't think so. I knew him in France, and unless he committed the crime in a fit of insanity, he wouldn't be capable of such a thing."

"Are you going to try to clear Grimshaw?"

"I'm going to try to find the murderer of Major Fester. Also I'm going to try to run down the gang that stole all that jewelry from Dr. Ludlow and his guests. That's the one dead-sure way to clear myself and you, and to do that I've got to stay right on the job."

"Gosh! You certainly got nerve, buddy! I think if I was you, I'd be so scared that I'd make a get-away."

"That would put us both in bad, Gypsy. It would look like a confession of guilt. Now I'll take you across the tracks and put you on the road to Dr. Ludlow's. You go and get that job and meanwhile I'm going back by a shortcut."

They shook hands for good-by at the automobile road and their eyes met in a long look of comradeship and understanding.

"So long, kid!"

"Good luck, buddy!"

Kane struck off by the trail he had come while Gypsy limped along the road to the estate. Kane presently reached the cañon below the wrecked car.

As he swung along the footpath under the trees he was suddenly halted by a gruff command from the bushes.

"Put up your hands! Be damned quick about it, too!"

Kane stared into the glittering muzzle of a revolver.

CHAPTER XII.

COMPLICATIONS.

KANE stared at the muzzle of the revolver that was glaring at him like an evil eye, and his hands shot up over his head as if somebody had touched the spring of a mechanical figure.

But when he saw the red, glowering face behind the gun his shock of fear gave way to astonishment and then amusement.

"Cut out the funny business, Murphy! What do you think you're doing?"

"I had my orders to bring you back to the house and, bedad, this time you'll come. Either you march along with me or you'll go on the dead wagon! Take your choice!"

"You must be crazy! I'm not trying to run away. If I wanted to escape would I be coming back to meet you?"

"I'm taking no chances! You hoof it right along that path ahead of me, and mind, if you try to break away again I'll put six bullets in your back."

Kane did as he was directed. Dan

Murphy followed painfully and slowly, for his wrenched leg was still giving him trouble. Occasionally he called out: "Take it easy! Not so fast! And mind you, don't try to bolt now, you young fox!"

In this fashion they reached the Ludlow estate, and not until Kane walked up to the front steps did the zealous policeman feel quite secure.

They found Lieutenant Kearney in the library with Dr. Ludlow.

"What's all this?" asked Kearney brusquely, as Murphy shoved his prisoner into the room.

"Here's your man! I brought him back."

The green policeman's face was smiling and triumphant. He had stuck to his prisoner and made good in spite of many difficulties.

But the lieutenant did not even know that Kane had been off the place.

"Take him away again," shouted Kearney.

"What shall I do with him, sir?"

"I don't care! Turn him loose in the lawn. Go play mumble-de-peg with him. That is if you've got enough brains to play mumble-de-peg."

Kearney's ill temper was caused by the new complications that had come up since the young man had left the house.

The latest mystery was the beautiful Mrs. Anstruther, that former actress, now the widow of an enormously rich banker. When she had heard of the discovery of Major Fester's body, she had rushed violently into the hall where the corpse lay, thrust aside the medical examiner and threw herself upon the dead man with shrieks of hysterical grief.

Then she had fainted and was carried to her bed where she lay delirious, moaning over and over again: "Oh, what have I done! What have I done! And I loved you so!"

The woman had not come to her senses. Dr. Ludlow had stayed at her bedside trying to soothe her tortured nerves, but finally he was forced to give her a hypodermic.

"Now, what the devil did the woman mean by that speech?" asked Lieutenant Kearney again and again as he sat opposite the doctor in his library.

"I can't make anything out of it, lieutenant. I know, of course, that Major Fester and Mrs. Anstruther were good friends. They had seen a good deal of each other at this house party. They had danced together, motored and taken long walks in each other's company, but I did not dream that she cared for him like this."

"She was hard hit, that's certain." Lieutenant Kearney shot a sudden penetrating look at the doctor. "Is she a violent tempered woman? Is she the sort of woman who would do something in a rage that she might regret afterward?"

"Possibly. I've seen her fly into a frightful passion at her maid. The girl broke a hand mirror that Mrs. Anstruther prized, and for a moment I thought there would be bloodshed."

"Bloodshed! What did she do?"

"Let fly at the maid with a pair of scissors. Fortunately her aim was poor, but she put a lot of force into it. The blade stuck in the door behind her and broke off."

"So that's the kind of a vixen she is!" growled Kearney. "Say, isn't she the ex-chorus girl that tried to shoot Jimmy Garrison? You know, that rich young clubman who skipped out to Europe."

"Oh, but that was a long time ago—many years ago!" cried Dr. Ludlow. "She settled down since then."

"I'm not so sure that she's settled down," mused Kearney. "That Garrison shooting was caused by too much philandering. There was another chorus lady come between her and the young man, and so she pulled a gun on him. I remember now, that is how it was."

"Oh, that's ancient history," said the doctor. "Good Lord, the woman married since then and got into a different set. She left all the rough life behind her after she married Anstruther."

"Is that so? What about Major Fester? Was he the sort of man that would make up to two or three ladies at once? Would there have been a lovers' quarrel between the major and this ex-chorus girl?"

"That I can't say. But if you're trying

to build up a case against Mrs. Anstruther on account of her hysterical ravings, I think you are on the wrong track."

"What makes you so sure of that, doctor?"

"Well, for one thing, you've got the murderer locked up already. I haven't a doubt in the world that it was Grimshaw who did it."

"It looks bad for Grimshaw. That's correct. But I'm overlooking no bets."

Lieutenant Kearney scowled thoughtfully for a few moments, twisting his mustache, then asked abruptly: "What about Mrs. Anstruther's maid? Is she here in the house?"

"Yes, Adele is with her mistress."

"Good enough!" Kearney pulled the bell for a servant. "I'll hear what Adele has to say about this affair between her mistress and Major Fester."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MOTIVE CHASER.

WHEN Mrs. Anstruther's maid was ushered into the formidable presence of Lieutenant Kearney, that pert and sly-faced young woman grew pale and ill at ease. She had inherited a horror of the police, for her father had seen the inside of more than one French prison, and as a child Adele had watched him being dragged off to jail by the gendarmes. She gulped hard and dropped a curtsy to the doctor and the glowering, impressive-looking officer who sat at the desk.

"Don't be afraid, my girl," said Dr. Ludlow. "Nobody is going to hurt you. Just answer Lieutenant Kearney's questions truthfully and you will have nothing to fear."

"But I know nothing—nothing whatever," protested Adele, spreading her hands despairingly. "I saw no robber. I know nothing of who took the jewels. I cannot tell you who killed Major Fester."

"Can that!" commanded Kearney brusquely. "I didn't ask you here to make a speech. Answer the questions I put up to you. Mind you give me a straight answer, or it will be the worse for you."

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir! Only I don't want you should believe that I am a thief and a murderer."

Kearney smiled grimly. "What was going on between your mistress and Major Fester?"

"How do you mean, sir—going on?"

"You know what I mean. He was making love to her. She was crazy about him. Isn't that so?"

The light of scandal sparkled in the French girl's eyes. "They were together often," she admitted with a smile that implied more than her words.

"Come on, now, come on! Tell us all you know. Wasn't the major hanging around her all the time? Didn't they go horseback riding together?"

"Oh, yes. And on long walks, all alone. But there was nothing wrong in that."

"Who said there was? Did he ever visit her in her rooms."

"Oh, no, sir!" The girl rolled her eyes in horror, then added with a sly smile: "Of course sometimes I was sent on an errand into town. I don't know what happened then."

"Did they ever have any quarrels? Was she jealous of him?"

"Oh, no, sir! That is, not often."

"How do you mean that, 'not often'? Did they have a quarrel in your presence?"

"Only once, just a few days ago. It was after Major Fester had taken a long ride in the motor with Miss Eunice."

At that Dr. Ludlow raised his hand.

"Listen, Kearney—I don't like this line of questioning. It's nothing but scandal, and I most emphatically object to having my daughter's name brought into this mess."

"Easy now; easy, Dr. Ludlow!" Kearney's manner was conciliatory, but evidently he was not willing to give up this lead.

"Nobody's trying to make scandal about your daughter. Did Major Fester show any attention to Miss Eunice—enough to make Mrs. Anstruther jealous?"

"Of course not!" exclaimed Dr. Ludlow indignantly.

"Nothing to get huffy about if he was," continued Kearney. "Major Fester was a

bachelor, I understand. Good record, good family, good salary from the government. Suppose he did want to court your daughter. What's the harm?"

An expression of intense loathing swept over Dr. Ludlow's face, but it passed instantly, and he replied with forced suavity: "I dare say you are right. There was nothing against the major's character, or I wouldn't have had him as my guest. Still—in the circumstances you can understand that I don't want my daughter's name mixed up in it."

"Sorry, doctor, but it's up to me to get the truth about this murder. Looks to me as if the trail is getting warm." He wheeled suddenly upon Adele. "Isn't it true that your mistress flew into a rage when she heard that Major Fester had been paying attention to Miss Eunice?"

"She didn't like it, sir."

"Were you present when she accused Major Fester of playing fast and loose with her affections? Did you hear her say that she wouldn't stand for him making love to two women at once?"

Confused by this flood of questions, the girl stammered weakly: "Y-yes. I heard something like that. Mrs. Anstruther was wild. I was afraid she was going to take it out on me."

"A-ha! She was wild, was she? What did she say to the major? Did she threaten his life?"

"No, not that—not exactly, sir."

"What did she say? Try to remember her exact words."

Lieutenant Kearney was boring her with hypnotic eyes, and the girl was reduced to helpless terror.

"She said: 'You leave that pasty-faced doll alone, or I'll make you wish you'd never been born!'"

"Is that all she said? Did she threaten to kill him?"

"She said: 'If you don't come back to me, I know a way to fix you. Before I'm through with you, you'll wish you were dead.'"

The girl spat out the words with such hatred that the doctor shuddered.

"Is that all?" asked Kearney. "What did the major say in reply?"

"He just laughed, sir."

"He laughed? When did that take place?"

"The night before he was killed, sir."

CHAPTER XIV.

SCIENCE ON THE SCENT.

AS Adele left the room, still terrified from her encounter with the formidable officer of the law, Kearney leaned back and smiled contentedly. "Things are shaping up," he observed. "As I see it, Mrs. Anstruther, that ex-chorus girl with a record for violence, is up to her neck in this crime."

"What about the other clews? What about Grimshaw, who practically confessed?"

"Wait a minute! The whole thing fits together like a jigsaw puzzle. Major Fester was in with a gang of gem robbers. He had planned to let some of them into the house last night, and meanwhile he had played fast and loose with the affections of that fascinating Mrs. Anstruther. She got sore at him for making up to your daughter Eunice, and threatened to get even with him. After that, of course, she would keep a close eye on his movements and when he went prowling around the house she knew that something was up.

"Maybe she discovered the loss of her jewelry about the same time. Anyhow she had a hunch that the major was involved in some crooked work and she guessed that this was her time to get even. Not having the nerve to interfere with him herself, she hunted up Grimshaw, who had a grudge against the major, anyhow. Grimshaw followed her tip, sneaked around in the dark until he located the major in the library, where he grabbed up that knife from your desk and went after him.

"The major ran into the hall, Grimshaw after him, and, as he caught up with Fester, drove the knife into his back. Then he was scared of what he had done, shoved the body into the closet, and because the murderer was a shell-shocked soldier, off his nut half the time, he went away and hid instead of rousing the household.

" When morning came the poor fool was not sure whether he had dreamed it or really killed the major. You see, he *imagined* doing that so many times that when it actually happened he may have thought it was another dream.

" Then, when he saw the major lying there stiff and cold the next morning, it set him dippy again and he started to rave.

" You see, doctor, how this explains everything. The woman still cared for Major Fester, and when she saw that her tip to Grimshaw had been the cause of the killing she screamed: ' Oh, what have I done!'

" Now, there's my theory, and with a little plugging I'll get the evidence to clinch every point."

" What about the jewelry, that cuff link found in the major's pocket?" asked the doctor.

" That's easy. He had helped collect the loot, stuffing it in his pockets as he went along. Before Grimshaw found him, he must have turned it all over to the gang, who made their get-away through the window. In his hurry the cuff link was overlooked, and that's how we happened to find it in his clothes."

" That's a very ingenious theory, lieutenant!" Dr. Ludlow agreed. " It seems to cover the case pretty thoroughly, if you can prove all your points."

" Oh, we'll prove 'em all right—don't you worry!"

There was a knock at the door, and a servant announced that Mr. Ferguson was outside.

" Show him in," said Lieutenant Kearney. " Ferguson is the finger-print expert from headquarters. I'm going to have him photograph the finger-prints on the window sill upstairs and he will take along the knife and bring out the finger-prints on the handle."

" One moment," said Dr. Ludlow. " Are you going on the theory that my other guests and my secretary, Mr. Ryder, are innocent?"

" Your guests can go any time they want to. All except Mrs. Anstruther. I want to talk to her when she has recovered."

" I'll be responsible for her not leaving the house," said the doctor.

" All right. Your guarantee will be sufficient. As for your secretary, I wouldn't be surprised if he were mixed up in that gang. I had his rooms searched, but nothing was found. I'll admit I haven't got the goods on him yet, but I'll have him shadowed, and sooner or later he'll give himself away."

" By all means keep your eye on him. Now here's your finger-print expert."

Ferguson entered, a small, sandy-haired man with pale-blue eyes, who looked like a dentist or a struggling physician. He carried a case containing a camera and other apparatus.

After the introduction to Dr. Ludlow, Kearney produced the knife still wrapped in paper.

" Here it is! Here's the weapon that did the killing. I wrapped it up carefully so that the finger-prints wouldn't get rubbed off."

Ferguson spread the paper on the desk and looked at the long, razor-edged blade, which he knew retained the imprint of the murderer's hand. There was only a slight stain of blood on the steel, but the paper was smeared and streaked.

" Holy smoke!" exclaimed Kearney. " It was so dark in the hall that I didn't notice the finger-prints on that paper."

Quite distinct among the smears was the imprint of four broad, heavy fingers and a large thumb.

" There's the signature of Major Fester's murderer," remarked Ferguson quietly.

The men looked at it for a few moments with strained attention. They were silent as the gruesomeness of this find sank in.

On this paper, just a few hours before, a murderer had tried to wipe away the traces of blood from his hand.

" I'll want a finger-print record of every person in this house—servants, guests, everybody," said the expert in a matter-of-fact tone. " Not that I think they will correspond with the finger-prints on this paper," he added. " These have the distinguishing characteristics of the violent criminal, the individual who seems destined from the cradle to commit murder."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Devil of the Lake

By JOHN J. ROWLANDS

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

"YES, six of 'em. One after the other they headed for Devils Lake and none of 'em ever came back; nobody's seen 'em since."

Only the crackling of the birch in the stove and the monotonous sawing of a borer in a log of the wall broke the hush that engulfed the cabin when Tom McDonald stopped speaking.

He pulled out his knife and began chipping flakes from a plug of tobacco, slowly dropping each curved fragment into the blackened bowl of his pipe. Then he leaned forward, lifted a glowing coal from the bed of the fire and carefully tamped it down on the tobacco with a calloused forefinger. Little clouds of fragrant blue smoke curled from his white beard as he slowly stood up and went to the door.

It was late in August, a cool night without moon or stars to break the black pall that bound the wilderness. Yet to McDonald the darkness hid nothing. There was the river flowing slowly past the cabin, and beyond that the little hills covered with spruce and pine, stretching away across a hundred miles of silent forest to the cold, gray waters of Hudson's Bay.

"Not that any of them was worth having back," McDonald resumed, as he turned again to his seat. "They was a bad lot, the whole six of 'em—claim jumpers, live-easies in one way or another. Never did any honest prospectin' all the time they was around this district. You couldn't trust any of 'em, and I believe to this day it was one of that gang that took my spruce stern paddle—the one I always liked the best. No, sir, I was glad when I seen the last of 'em."

Strothers leaned forward and cupped his chin in his hands, fixing his gaze on a jagged line of golden fire gleaming through a crack in the stove door.

"Well, what do you think happened to them?" he asked in a lazy drawl.

"Never have been able to figure it out. You can think of a lot of things that might 'a' happened, but somehow none of 'em seem to fit right. If one man went away like that and never come back I'd say he went over in the rapids, or maybe got into some bear trap, or the like of such things we know does happen. But when you take six men going at different times and never bein' heard of again, it's another thing.

"That lake always has had a bad name. The Indians say Manitoupeepagee—the devil—lives there, but I don't take no stock in such talk. But just the same I never was one to go trapping for trouble, and that's why in all the fifteen years I been roamin' around this country I never went there. And if the devil lives in that lake I figure he ain't the man to want that gang of cutthroats around him.

"There always has been stories—mostly that and nothing else, I figure—that there's placer gold somewhere up that way. That bunch heard the story, and Jim Farrar—him that was drove out of Caribou Camp for high-gradin'—started out to look for easy pickin's. Said he wasn't scared of God or the devil. He didn't have sense enough to be, anyway.

"When Jim didn't come back in six weeks, like he said he would, Tom Ropes got a notion his pal had struck it rich and he started in. Bob Allen, John Gard and Bill Moses went in one after the other. Toby Smith was the last to go. That was a little over two years ago, and it's nigh to five years since Jim Farrar left. None of 'em trusted the others, and I reckon that's why they went in alone. As I say, it ain't natural for such as them to drop out of sight like that; most of 'em die of old age."

The old man stopped to meditate, and as they sat puffing at their pipes, the stillness of the night was broken by the long-drawn, quavering howl of a timber wolf. Again and again the gray killer sent forth his call.

Then all was silent again until, with startling suddenness, the cry of the pack on a scent came from far across the hills. Soon the quick, short tonguing was lost to hearing as the wolves sped away on the trail of their quarry.

McDonald looked up and for a moment the bubbling in his pipe stopped.

"Sorta early for them to be running in packs," he said.

"You don't suppose wolves had anything to do with the disappearance of the men?" Strothers suggested.

"Well, there was some what thought the gray fellers got 'em, but in all the time I been up here I never seen a wolf what would come to the point of attackin' a man. They foller you and sometimes they hang around your camp, but none ever bothered me. No, I reckon it wasn't the gray fellers. It was somethin' else, but I can't figure it out. What's your notion of it?"

Strothers looked up and his eyes met those of the old prospector. "I don't know," he answered, "but I am going to find out."

"What!" roared the old man. "You don't mean to sit there and tell me you are going to be such a fool as to try to make Manitoupeepagee?"

"Why not? I've nothing but myself to lose, and there's a chance I may gain something." Strothers stood up and faced McDonald. His eyes were bright and he spoke with the eagerness of a boy planning an adventure.

"Look here, Tom," he went on, "I've been moping around this north country long enough without making a real strike. All I ever find is gold in quartz, and who in hell but a man with money can work that stuff. It's small potatoes selling claims on a chance. What I'm after is placer stuff—sand I can wash with a pan! Gravel I can sluice! Nuggets to pick from the bed of a stream. Maybe it's there at Manitoupeepagee, and again, maybe not. I'm going to see. Superstitions be blasted; I can take care of myself."

"You're plumb crazy!" shouted the old man. "Clean crazy! No, don't be a fool, son. Other good men has wanted to go there, but it ain't worth the chance. You take my word for that and keep away from Devil's Lake."

Both men were silent for several minutes. From somewhere in the muskeg south of the cabin came the weird "Who-e-e-e, Who-e-e-e, Who-o" of an owl. The breeze had set in from the north and now it was sighing in the tops of the jackpines about the cabin with a sound like the weeping of a woman in the night.

"You can't change my mind, Tom," came Strothers's voice again. "I always did like to play a hunch and I've got a hunch now that it 'll pay me to make a trip to the lake where all those Indian devils live." He smiled and his eyes blazed as his enthusiasm grew. "Yes, I'm going —day after to-morrow."

"Well, son, you're your own boss," the old man answered, "but I want to tell you right here that you can't make the trip there and back"—his voice dropped to a whisper—"if you ever come back—before the snow flies. Think it over."

McDonald eyed Strothers as he stood up and stretched until his fingers touched the log beams, a splendid specimen of a man, with the fair hair and features of a Viking, tall and well-knit, with the narrow hips, deep chest and broad shoulders of an athlete. Life in the north had made him lean and hard, quick as a lynx in his movements and confident of himself in emergencies.

Because of his natural good nature men sometimes made the mistake of trying to impose upon Strothers, but quickly learned that deep behind the whimsical light that played in his pleasant gray eyes there was an ever alert and serious side to the man.

Sleep had always come quickly to him, but to-night he lay awake for hours, looking back over the years since he left home. Educated to follow in the footsteps of his father in prospecting the field of industry for gold in its minted form, he had chosen instead to roam the open places, seeking in the solitudes of the forests for the gold at its source.

He had seen the North in all its moods; he knew the hardships of winter travel on the barren lands in the merciless grip of the bitter winds; in summer he had explored the silent rivers and lakes; he had dared the white smother of the rapids and trod the dim trails of the forest, glorying in the freedom of his life, bound to nothing, responsible to no one but himself.

He wondered now what trick of fate had caused him to leave the security and certain success of a place in the firm of Richard Strothers & Company. It was to have been "Richard Strothers & Son." He remembered the bitterness of his father's disappointment when he made his choice.

But he felt no regret. The strange fascination of the hunt for the earth's hidden treasure lured him on, and the thought of a journey to Manitoupeepagee promised new thrills, perhaps the big strike. He searched his brain for some plausible solution of the mysterious disappearance of the six prospectors, and he was still seeking it when finally he fell asleep.

II.

THE blue-gray mists of dawn hung low over the black, sluggish water of the river and the sun was still below the shadowy hills beyond when Strothers set out in his canoe for the camp of Billy Jackfish, an old Objibway trapper, who was said to know the approximate location of Devil's Lake.

While they ate their breakfast McDonald had tried again to dissuade Strothers from attempting the dangerous trip, but the latter laughed off all arguments and finally the old man, convinced that Strothers would not be turned from his purpose, offered to help in getting together a light outfit for fast traveling.

The Indian was splitting ash for a toboggan in preparation for the winter's trapping when Strothers beached his canoe and strode toward the patched old tent in which he and his squaw lived.

Jackfish grunted a greeting and went on with his work until Strothers pulled forth his pouch and offered him some tobacco. The Indian was not slow to accept, for more than once he had tasted and approved the white man's mellow smoke.

"What I came to find out," Strothers said after they had smoked in silence for a few minutes, "is how I can get to Devil's Lake. Tom McDonald says you trapped

up the river two winters ago and saw the lake."

Jackfish sat for a few moments like a weird bronze figure. Then he blinked slowly and he took his pipe from his mouth. His black eyes were searching the face of the white man as if he feared the bush madness had come upon him.

"What for you want to go Manitoupeepagee?" he asked as if reluctant to utter the dread name. A shadow of fear fell over the erstwhile inscrutable countenance of the old Indian as he waited for an answer to his question.

"Want to see what's up there," Strothers said, studying the other closely.

"Manitoupeepagee live there, and the Windago," the old Indian warned in a guttural whisper, glancing quickly behind him as if he expected to see the evil spirits of which he spoke lurking in the forest shadows. "You big fool go Manitoupeepagee. No Indians go there. Him bad place. Six white men go. They never come back. You no come back."

Jackfish, who had been squatting, arose and moved nearer the white man as if seeking protection.

"I'm not worrying," Strothers told him with a laugh in an effort to dispel the Indian's uneasiness. "If Windago or Manitoupeepagee wanted me they would have got me long ago. All I want to know is how you get there."

Jackfish shook his head slowly. "Don't know," he answered.

Strothers pulled a new plug of tobacco from his pocket and turned it over with some show. Jackfish's beady black eyes fastened eagerly on the tit-bit.

"If I just knew the trails that would take me near the lake I could make the rest of the way," Strothers drawled.

The Indian grunted.

"You know Little Big Rapid?" he asked, his eyes still fixed on the plug of tobacco. Strothers nodded. "You go to foot of rapid, two days away. Big jackpine on right. There you find portage to Gray Goose Lake. Follow him. When you get to lake, paddle canoe to small bay in west end and climb high hill. There you see Manitoupeepagee far away where the sun goes, maybe one day, maybe two day away. You know him by big cleef and white mark on side."

Strothers handed the Indian the plug as Jackfish knew he would and thanked him for his help.

"When you go?" the old man asked as Strothers turned away.

"To-morrow at daylight."

Jackfish slowly shook his head and prefaced his next remark with a grunt.

"No can make before big snow," he said. "Winter come early."

"What makes you think so?"

The Indian turned and beckoned Strothers to follow. He led the way to a shadowy hollow where a tiny stream flowed from a marshy spring. Suddenly he bent down and lifted a dead leaf from the mold at the edge of the stream.

One side of the leaf was white with frost. Then Jackfish pointed into the foliage of a near-by tree and the young man saw that many of the leaves were turning yellow; some had already taken on the scarlet dress of autumn.

"Snow come soon," the Indian warned again. "Maybe in one moon. Musquash build him big warm house and him know."

Then Jackfish turned and went without another word to his work by the tent. Strothers stood in deep thought for a moment before he wheeled, and strode toward his canoe on the beach.

As he paddled back to McDonald's he reviewed all the Indian had said. As for Manitoupeepagee — Indian superstition! And Windago—who could believe in mad Indians of gigantic stature striding with heads above the tree tops in search of humans to devour!

He laughed; he would forget all that. But he had respect for the old Indian's warning against the coming of the snow, although he said nothing of that to McDonald.

Strothers spent most of the day going over the fourteen-foot birchbark canoe in which he would travel. Every seam was inspected, several cracks were sewed and then smeared with gum until finally McDonald, after close inspection, pronounced her "as tight as a drum."

That evening the men completed the outfit. Long accustomed to traveling light, Strothers now discarded everything but the barest necessities. A tarpaulin was to serve as a shelter when he could not sleep under the canoe. Beans and pork, flour and raisins were carefully packed in the little canvas grub-bags and old Tom himself made sure that there was sufficient tea, and, unseen by Strothers, slipped in two extra plugs of tobacco from his own supply. Some line and a few fish hooks were tucked in a corner for emergencies, and another important task was to inspect and oil Strothers's repeating rifle.

"Better take a couple of extra boxes. May need 'em," Tom told Strothers, as he added them to the supply of ammunition in the packsack.

"Guess that's all," Strothers observed, after checking the items of his outfit.

"Just two things more," Tom said, climbing on a box until he could thrust his arm into the darkness of the cabin loft. He brought forth his own pair of Rupert House snowshoes, long, slender frames designed for fast traveling, with webbing of the finest quality.

"I want you to take the shoes," the old man said, "and my rabbitskin blanket. I figure it 'll be cold 'fore long. You can cache them somewhere on the trail where they'll be handy to get at."

Strothers would have protested at the extra weight, for every pound meant less speed, but he saw that to refuse would hurt the old prospector.

"Maybe you're right, Tom," he said. "I'll take them, and much obliged."

III.

THE stars were still sparkling in the cool darkness just before dawn when Strothers pushed off in his canoe and with an easy twist of the paddle headed upriver. The journey to Manitoupeepagee had begun!

"Good luck, my boy, good luck!" Tom shouted, and the hills beyond caught the old man's farewell and sent it back echoing again and again: "Good luck. Good luck!"

"*Au revoir;* I'll be back within a month," came Strothers's voice out of the dawn mists over the water.

McDonald stood in silence listening to the regular click of the paddle on the gunwale until the sound died away. He turned and went back to the cabin, mumbling to himself.

Startled creatures of the forest fled from the water's edge as Strothers pushed his canoe up the silent, shadowy reaches of the river. A doe and her half grown fawn, nibbling at the lily pads in a little cove, dashed away with snorts of surprise, and the thumping of hurrying hoofs when he suddenly came upon them around a bend of the stream.

On both sides of the river the forest stretched away, dark and mysterious, silent except for the noises of its creatures. Miles of green foliage broken by strips of white beach, and here and there the "slick" of white water, slipped past as Strothers dipped his paddle with the short, powerful stroke of the north country canoe man.

And farther up the river he moved through the big burns where fire had devoured the forest life and left the bones of its giants to bleach in the summer sun. Here charred stumps stood in stark relief against the sky, like markers in an unkempt city of the dead.

"Flies gone, no mosquitoes; weather couldn't be better," Strothers told himself. He spoke aloud, a habit he had acquired from living alone in the wilderness for months at a stretch.

"Sing, laugh, talk," he told McDonald once. "That's the way to keep off the bush madness. It's when a fellow gets silent that Watigo plays hell with his head."

Strothers reached Little Big Rapids, where the waters of the river plunge over a series of rocky chutes for a drop of a hundred feet, at noon the next day. He looked at once for the pine which old Jackfish had told him marked the portage to Gray Goose Lake. It was there, and he found the trail, now overgrown with underbrush, leading away to the west.

The portage was hard and the sun had dropped behind the hills across the waters of the lake when he lowered his canoe on

the beach after the second trip from the river.

Standing black against the western sky was the hill from which the old Indian said Manitoupeepagee could be seen. Other men, perhaps, would have rushed on, eager to catch a glimpse of the place, but Strothers, with the patience peculiar to the woodsman, made his camp on the beach at the end of the portage and rolled himself in his scarlet Hudson's Bay blanket under the overturned canoe.

He was up at dawn, but the sun had lifted well over the treetops before he climbed the hill. Beneath him the forest stretched away to the horizon, a motionless sea of dark green, broken here and there by lakes and rivers—patches and threads of silver in the brilliant morning light.

And straight away to the west, perhaps forty miles across the green wilderness, he saw the object of his search. There was the lake and through his field glasses he could discern the great cliff with the white band across its face. There lay Manitoupeepagee!

Like most men of the North, Strothers seldom used a compass. He had developed that sense of direction by which men move through trackless wastes with unerring judgment, guided by the sun and the stars or the flow of rivers. Now he sat and studied the country through which he must travel to reach the lake, sketching on a bit of birchbark a crude map of what appeared to be the only natural route toward his goal.

He would take advantage of a chain of lakes and streams to avoid overland traveling as much as possible. He noted several landmarks, and once his heart leaped when his glasses picked up a tiny moving speck on a distant lake. He looked again and found it was not a man in a canoe, but only a swimming moose.

IV.

All that day the man pushed on, toiling with canoe and packsack; he slashed a way through thick underbrush with his hand ax; he poled and sweated in the swift water of the streams; and dipped his paddle with dogged perseverance in the lakes, a welcome relief from the hardships of the rough portages.

As he progressed, traveling became more difficult. In contrast to the flat country bordering the river, he now found himself surrounded by rolling hills. The lakes were small and deep and the streams turbulent, rushing through rocky gorges, which made frequent portages necessary.

As he approached his goal Strothers became more cautious, paddling quietly, taking care to avoid the hollow click of the handle against the gunwale. His rifle was loaded and lying in front of him where he could get into action quickly. But nothing happened, and the lack of trails from one lake to another indicated that the waterway was little if ever used as a line of travel.

It was when he portaged into a small lake just before sundown that he saw signs that some one had been over the route before him. On the white, sandy beach close to a little brook he found the remains of a camp fire and a sapling lying over a log with the butt weighted down. Some one had boiled a kettle there.

But examination showed the camp was old, for rain and snow had flattened the remains of the fire until it was little more than a dark spot in the sand.

Strothers quietly launched his canoe and paddled to a little island several hundred yards from the shore. There he made camp for the night in the shelter of a gnarled old spruce.

He cooked his supper over a tiny fire of dry twigs which gave off little smoke to betray his whereabouts. The fire was put out before darkness came and Strothers settled himself for the night with a peculiar sensation of uneasiness. He lay awake for hours, every sense on the alert, listening for he knew not what.

Once during the night a lynx sent its blood-chilling shrieks echoing in the hills and the man awoke with a start. But it was a familiar voice, a cry he had heard in the dark hours of many other nights, and so he slept again until the dawn came.

The full light of day revealed a hill a

short distance north of the lake on which he camped and Strothers saw an opportunity to reconnoiter before proceeding further. Manitoupeepagee, he knew, could not be far away.

Once upon the summit of the hill, he saw the water of a big lake glistening in the sunlight, less than two miles to the west. On the opposite shore a great cliff, broken by a wide band of what Strothers recognized as white quartz, lifted several hundred feet above the water's edge, and he knew he was looking upon Manitoupeepagee.

The strange stories told by the Indians and the disappearance of the six men had led Strothers to expect something quite different from what he saw. There was nothing foreboding about the place, as he had expected; nothing to lend color to the tales of horror it inspired. Instead, it had the general appearance of hundreds of other lakes of the North.

The shore line was broken by deep bays and little coves. Wooded islands dotted its shimmering bosom, and here and there stretches of white sandy beach lay between the water and dark green edge of the forest.

As Strothers's gaze followed the shore line he saw the lake as a great half closed fist with the index finger pointing almost due north. He had come upon it close to the tip of the finger where the lake was less than half a mile wide, but far to the south the waters spread out to a width of perhaps eight miles.

Lying behind a dwarfed spruce that clung tenaciously to the thin soil of the hill-top, Strothers studied the lake through his field glasses. There was no sign of life; no sound to break the silence of the forest.

"Devil be blasted!" he muttered aloud as he made his way down the hill. "Don't believe that gang ever came in here."

The contrast between the lake as he saw it, and the place his imagination had painted, threw the man off his guard for the moment, and he moved with less caution. He saw nothing to fear.

Back at the little lake where he had spent the night, Strothers cached his canoe, old Tom's snowshoes and part of his outfit on a crude platform between two trees. He had decided that in case of emergency it would be wise to have the canoe and some equipment on the back trail.

It was while he was searching at the end of the little lake for an opening to strike overland to Manitoupeepagee that he came suddenly upon an old trail. A deep rut in the center showed it was used by moose and deer, and in a soft spot near the lake he found the tracks of a wolf, but there was no indication man had trod it recently.

The path went straight over a little rise and led away in a direction that would bring him to the shore of Manitoupeepagee. With packsack swinging from his shoulders, Strothers hurried on, welcoming the easy progress after the hard traveling from Gray Goose Lake.

The trail took him due west for nearly a mile. There it turned toward the north and he walked through the shadowy aisles of a heavy growth of pine and spruce,—great trees that had stood there for hundreds of years, hidden from the eager eyes of the lumberman, untouched by fire. Here the air was damp and heavy with the scent of resin, and in the little clearings where the sun shot golden beams to the earth, a blue haze lifted the perfume of sweet ferns and bracken to him.

Checking the direction of the trail, Strothers estimated it would bring him out close to the top of the lake. He moved on, holding his gun in readiness, for as he neared the lake all the stories he had heard crowded out of his memory to warn him to be on the alert.

He walked noiselessly, for the trail was covered with an age-old carpet of pine needles. Once he stopped to listen, but no sound came to break the all-pervading hush of the forest.

He smiled,—it seemed ridiculous to be sneaking through the woods with rifle ready as if in this great, peaceful wilderness he might be attacked. He was still smiling when suddenly the earth dropped from under his feet and he plunged downward.

Strothers lay still and groaned until slowly he drifted into the oblivion of a purple darkness. Then a great, green devil, dripping with the waters of the lake whence he came, stood over him and prodded him

in the side with a red-hot spear. And he saw a gigantic Indian striding through the forest with head above the waving tree-tops, snarling with bared fangs in search of humans to devour.

He opened his eyes, tried to move, and dropped back with a groan of pain. His left side burned and throbbed.

Above him Strothers saw the tops of the tall pines and beyond that patches of blue sky, and he realized that he was lying at the bottom of a deep pit, the base of which was larger than the top. His packsack was still on his shoulders and as he took account of himself he realized that he had landed on his rifle. That explained the pain in his side.

He managed to stand up, although the pain made him grit his teeth. The top of the pit was fully eight feet above his head, and he saw there was no hope of gaining a foothold on the sloping walls of the hole.

"Hell of a place to put a pitchfork, right in the middle of a trail!" he muttered.

Then he examined the bottom of the pit and for the first time realized that it was covered with a deep layer of pine and balsam boughs. He was puzzled. Pitfalls for game were never made like that, and—Then with startling suddenness it came to him—he was in a man-trap!

V.

All the stories that Strothers had ever heard about Manitoupeepagee came back to torment him. His head ached from the shock of the drop and for the moment he lost his nerve and clawed at the clay walls of his prison.

He soon realized escape was impossible and he sat down again to examine his rifle. It had not been damaged in the fall and its cold frame was reassuring.

Hours passed and the sky changed from blue to pale gold as the sun dropped low in the west. Strothers was sitting with his head on his knees, vainly casting about in his mind for some way to escape, when he became conscious of a shadow at the rim of the pit.

He lifted his head slowly until his eyes rested on the face of a girl. His fears had led him to expect something quite different and now he sat gazing at her in astonishment. She returned his gaze frankly, apparently studying him closely. Then she spoke.

"Are you hurt?"

Strothers was surprised, not by the question, but by the peculiar quality of her voice and the perfect enunciation of the words. She was obviously different from any woman he had seen in the north.

"Yes," he answered. "My left side aches—rib or something like that."

"I'm sorry."

She was standing now, and Strothers saw that she was tall, and for a girl, powerfully built. The shoulders were broad, but well-rounded, and her arms, which were bare almost to the shoulder, were browned by sun and wind, and muscular.

She wore a blue cotton dress, which, drawn in at the waist by a plaited rawhide belt, revealed the boyish lines of her figure. When she turned slightly the man saw that a holster dangled from the belt and from her right hand, half-hidden by a fold of her gown, the black muzzle of a revolver pointed at him.

"Don't point that gun at me," he snapped in a sudden wave of anger. "Not much danger of my escaping, I guess." The gun never moved. "What's the meaning of all this pitfall business?" he went on, stung by her attitude. "Do you make a business of trapping prospectors?"

The girl made no answer. Her deep brown eyes, set well apart, were fixed on his face as if she was seeking the answer to an unspoken question. The soft light of sunset fell on the masses of jet black hair that clustered about her face, and Strothers, even in his anger, knew he had never seen any one so beautiful before.

Sight of the girl had banished the man's uneasiness, but there was much to be explained and he was puzzled.

"Well," he said after a brief silence, "am I to get out of here?"

The girl looked down at him, and he saw that, beautiful and womanly as she was, there was a certain savage determination deep in her eyes.

"Yes," she said, "you are, but before I

help you up I warn you that you must obey me." The muzzle of the revolver was pointed at him significantly. "I mean what I say and I'll shoot if you make any move to escape."

"I'm not going to try to escape with this side paining me," Strothers replied. "Go ahead; get me out of this hole."

The girl disappeared and returned in a few moments with a crude ladder made of small logs.

"Before I let this down," she ordered, "give me your rifle. Hand it up stock first, and if you make a move I'll shoot."

Strothers picked up the rifle as she directed and with the revolver still pointing at him, she bent down and took it from his upraised hand. A moment later she lowered the ladder into the pit and Strothers slowly climbed to the surface, dragging his packsack with him.

"Now," she commanded, "you must cover the pit again."

Under her direction the man gathered small saplings from a pile evidently cut and hidden in the undergrowth for that purpose and laid them across the yawning mouth of the hole. His side pained him and he worked with difficulty, but finally it was finished and pine needles were strewn over the treacherous network until the trap was hidden as part of the trail.

"Thank you," she said, when he had finished it.

"No trouble at all, I'm sure," Strothers replied sarcastically. The girl colored and somehow he was sorry for the words.

Without more ado she picked up his heavy packsack as if it had been a pillow, swung it over one shoulder and ordered him to walk ahead of her, pointing the way toward the lake with a swing of the revolver.

"I'll take that," Strothers said, indicating the packsack.

"Walk on," she commanded, ignoring the offer.

Long accustomed to the ways of the quiet men of the north, Strothers had become a close observer of human nature. Now as he walked slowly ahead of the girl he thought he had detected in her manner a certain reluctance. It was as if she was performing an unpleasant task with the object of getting it over with as quickly as possible.

But she worked thoroughly and Strothers admitted to himself that even had the circumstances been different, he would not have risked the accuracy of her aim. Something in the familiar way she held her revolver told him she knew how to use it.

She had asked nothing about him, not even his name, and as she had volunteered no information about herself, he hesitated to inquire.

They moved along in silence until Strothers, in an attempt to start a conversation, said:

"Lucky you came along when you did."

"I go there every evening," the girl replied.

"May I ask where we are going and what for?"

"You'll find all that out very soon," she told him quietly.

That ended the talk and they moved steadily on until the trail came out into a clearing at the head of the lake and turned west again, leading up a sharp hill near the north side of the cliff. Once over the crest of the rise, the path took another turn, this time southward, and after going perhaps half a mile they came suddenly upon a large log cabin.

Strothers, who had been keeping track of the direction in which they traveled, concluded that they were on the opposite side of the cliff from where he had first seen it.

"You will walk directly in," the girl commanded as they neared the building.

VI.

STEPPING from the bright sunshine into the shadowy interior of the cabin, it was several moments before Strothers could see objects clearly.

It was a big room in which he stood, with partitions at each end and doors leading into rooms beyond. A large cylindrical sheet-iron stove of the type seen in logging camps stood in the center and at the front of the building was a bookcase built of logs, filled with volumes of various sizes.

Strothers sank to a bench near the door

and looked about him with frank curiosity. The girl remained in the doorway watching him. Then as his eyes, now accustomed to the dim light, wandered slowly about the room, he met the gaze of a man sitting in a great armchair fashioned of split saplings in a corner facing the door.

The men scrutinized each other in silence. Then from the chair came a voice that set the air vibrating like the throbbing of a drum.

"How do you, sir? May I ask your name?" the man inquired.

"Richard Strothers."

The manner of the greeting set Strothers' mind at ease for the moment. The man in the big chair was, like the girl, different from any he had met in his travels in the north. His voice and bearing bespoke culture and there was a natural dignity about him that commanded instant respect.

Although he sat deep in his chair, Strothers saw that he must be unusually tall. The shoulders were broad and the chest deep. But it was his massive, shaggy gray head and the steel-blue eyes looking out from beneath heavy brows that held Strothers' attention. His heavy beard was cut straight across the bottom and the mustache above the straight, firm mouth had been neatly clipped.

In another place, in different dress, he might have been a great diplomat, or, perhaps, a leader in the financial world. But here in a wilderness cabin hundreds of miles from the rim of civilization, Strothers could not place him.

The man nodded to the girl and she quickly stepped from her place in the doorway and disappeared through a door in the back of the cabin. Strothers knew that the nod signified that she was relieved of guarding him. Then he saw that close by the other's chair was a bench on which lay a black revolver.

Behind on the wall within easy reach of the chair, a rifle hung on two pegs driven into the logs. It was clean and shining.

"Sorry to see you are hurt."

Strothers smiled. "Nothing much," he replied. "Thought I had a broken rib or two at first, but I guess not, for the pain is going away."

"Fine!" boomed the voice. "Then you can the better enjoy your meal."

Although the old man had asked Strothers' name, he had not returned the courtesy. Now he wanted to ask questions, wanted to know why he was trapped like an animal, what was to be his fate; but something told him to wait and watch.

Soon the girl appeared from the rear of the building with dishes of food, which she placed on a table of hewn logs.

"All ready," she announced after lighting an oil lamp.

It was not until then, when the old man lifted himself from his chair, that Strothers saw he was lame. He moved across the room with the aid of a heavy stick and seated himself on a bench at one end of the table, indicating a place for Strothers on his right.

The girl sat opposite Strothers who was quick to see that the holster still hung from her waist and that the revolver was in it. But for that sign that he was their prisoner, he might have been a friend, an honored guest, Strothers thought. He wondered what it was all about.

Once during the meal Strothers looked up to find the old man watching him with a strange expression.

"Have you everything you want?" he asked.

Strothers thanked him and went on eating, but he knew that the look he had seen, whatever it meant, did not concern his wants as his jailor sought to imply by the question.

Seated again in his armchair, the man filled and lighted his pipe with the comforting deliberation of ripening years. When it was drawing well and the smoke curled up about the shaggy head, his deep voice came out of the blue haze with startling suddenness.

"What brought you to this place?" he asked.

"Prospecting," Strothers told him. "I've been about everywhere else in the north and I thought I might find something different here—placer showings, perhaps."

In an instant the manner of the old man changed. His eyes narrowed under the

heavy brows until they glinted coldly like the sun on glare ice. His body straightened and his hands gripped the arms of his chair. His face took on a peculiar purple hue and the veins on his wide brow stood out in little twisting ridges.

"Gold!" he bellowed. "What led you to believe you would find it here?"

The outburst angered Strothers and he would have replied in kind, but at that instant the girl hurried into the room and went to the man's side.

"You mustn't excite yourself. You know it may do great harm," she warned him quietly.

The old man brushed her aside with the sweep of a long arm. His eyes were flashing now and he leaned forward in his eagerness to hear the answer to his question.

"Well," Strothers began, sparring for time, and wondering what effect his answer would have. "I heard a rumor there was gold up this way, but the place has such a bad name no one wants to come. Thought I'd find out for myself." He smiled. "The Indians tell you Manitoupeepagee—the devil himself—lives in the lake."

The man slowly lifted his great frame until he was leaning back with a certain graceful posture. His hands rested easily on the arms of the chair, and he sat like an ancient king awaiting the homage of his people. Then the chin lifted proudly and when he spoke the words vibrated deep in his chest and welled forth like the rumbling of distant thunder.

"I am Manitoupeepagee!—I am the Devil of the Lake!"

Puzzled and at a loss for a suitable reply, Strothers bowed. The act seemed to catch the fancy of the man. He smiled graciously and lay back in his chair with closed eyes as if to rest.

Strothers looked at the girl. She was still standing by the chair, but now suddenly she seemed to have lost her calm poise. In the weariness of her eyes, the sudden drooping of her figure, he saw an unexpressed appeal as if she wanted for the moment to escape the burden of her responsibilities.

He had seen that look in other women; usually they wept and sought comfort, but the eyes of the girl before him were dry, and as he watched her, her lips closed until her small, well-shaped mouth was drawn in a fine line. She straightened and looked down as the man opened his eyes and settled himself more comfortably.

A quick glance passed between them and she left the room, and soon Strothers heard her working in the kitchen.

There was little conversation after that until the old man leaned forward in his chair and pulled a heavy gold watch from his pocket.

"Time to seek our rest," he said. "You will sleep with me in that room," indicating the door at the opposite end of the cabin. He rose to his feet, taking the revolver from the bench beside him, and motioned the young man to precede him.

Completely at a loss to understand the strange situation in which he found himself, Strothers walked into the room. A candle burned on a rustic table opposite the door and he saw that there was a bunk at each end. The only window was less than a foot square and it was high in the wall.

It was not until he had removed his moccasins and loosened his clothing that Strothers realized how weary he was. The pain in his side came back, throbbing like a toothache, and his head felt numb. As he stretched himself on the bunk the old man approached.

"I'm sorry to do this," he said with a note of apology in the words, "but it must be."

He was holding a short length of heavy chain from which two padlocks dangled. At the same moment the girl appeared in the doorway and stood there while the man bent down and fastened one end of the chain to Strothers' right ankle. The other end he carried to a strong iron ring in the wall and secured it with a padlock.

"You won't be moving about in the night," he said. It was a warning rather than an inquiry. Then the old man went to the other bunk.

Strothers saw him place the revolver close by his head and then, as if by a prearranged signal, the girl moved quickly into the room and snuffed out the candle.

Strothers lay thinking. He reviewed the

events of the day in detail; he tried to remember all that had been said, every act of the girl and the old man. He lived again through the astonishing outburst of his captor, and heard the booming voice proclaim: "I am Manitoupeepagee! I am the Devil of the Lake!"

But he came back to where his reasoning started without an explanation—unless it was that he was the prisoner of a madman. That seemed the only reasonable conclusion. He began all over again until the weariness of body overwhelmed his mind and he slept.

When he awoke a shaft of light streaming through the narrow window above him, cut a golden swath in the darkness of the room. The old man was already dressed and he came and unlocked the chain from his ankle.

It was after breakfast when Strothers went to his packsack to get a pair of socks that the old man, who was in his accustomed place in his big chair, caught sight of the scarlet blanket.

"Let me see it, please," he asked.

Strothers took it to him and the old man touched the deep, warm folds, turning the corners over until he found the mark that identified it as a Hudson's Bay "four point." A dreamy look crept into his eyes and he gazed into space as one who looks back on beloved scenes of another day.

"Pull that bench over here," the old man said a little later on. "I want to talk to you."

When he had filled his pipe he looked at Strothers for a moment as if to fathom his thoughts.

"What I shall tell you," he began, "may seem strange, coming from one man to another whom he has never seen before. But it is nothing that can do any harm and I believe that knowing it you will be more reconciled to what is to come."

He was speaking quietly and Strothers listened tensely, for he felt that before the big man in the chair had finished speaking he would know why he was a prisoner in the cabin and what his fate would be.

VII.

"My name doesn't matter. You shall know me as John Stuart. I was with the Hudson's Bay Company when I was young," the voice from the chair went on, "I told you that. But I wasn't satisfied. I wanted to make a fortune. So I went to Montreal and in time I did accumulate a great deal of money—many fortunes. And when after years of hard work I had done all this, men began scheming to take my gold from me."

Strothers, watching the man's face closely, noted that the cold glint he had seen once before had crept into his eyes. "I thought I was too shrewd for such men," he went on, his voice rising as he talked; "but there I made my mistake, for it is far harder, my son, to keep a fortune than to earn it. They got it—all of it—and I was penniless, and bitter against the world.

"Then I came into the north again. I knew the country and its people, and again I became an employee of the company. It was while I was making a journey of inspection that I came here, and found gold—placer gold." His chest was heaving and the gray-blue eyes flashed. "I came back later, for no one knew of my discovery; and here I have been since, except for one trip out to bring in my niece. Only one man knows where I am. He brings us our supplies and does as I instruct, for he is a murderer, and I know much that he fears.

"It was easy to keep my isolation at first, for the evil name of the lake kept the Indians away, and there were no prospectors then. All that time I took measures to make sure that the reputation of the place should not die, and no one came here until five years ago. That man is still here. Later others came, five of them, and they are here."

Strothers choked back an exclamation of surprise, for he knew the six men to whom the old man referred must be the missing prospectors.

John Stuart stirred in his chair, and Strothers noticed that his right hand had moved toward the bench on which the revolver lay. It seemed an unconscious move in seeking a more comfortable position, but a few minutes later he realized it was a precaution.

The old man went on: "Now you have come, and you must join them."

Strothers leaped to his feet.

"You mean I must remain a prisoner here?" he gasped.

The other nodded. His hand slipped nearer the black revolver, and, although Strothers had not seen her enter, the girl was now standing in the doorway from the kitchen. Her hand was on her revolver in its holster.

The man raised his hand. "Sit down, please," he commanded. "I have more to say."

But Strothers stood and glared at the other for a moment.

"What right have you to hold me or any one else a prisoner?" he asked angrily. "Do you realize what it means?"

The man ignored the question and again motioned Strothers to sit down. It was then that he caught sight of the girl, and something in her eyes—a pained expression, he thought—made him drop to the bench again. He felt it was what she wanted him to do, for she seemed relieved.

"I told you I lost a fortune," the old man continued. "Now I am accumulating another. The men who came here are helping me do it, and you shall do your part."

Strothers sat white with anger, but he controlled himself and listened. As the man went on he became more calm; for some inexplicable reason the indignation he felt when first he heard that he was to be held a prisoner slowly died out.

"When I have a fortune equal to that I lost," the man was saying, "you and those who are here will be released—in a year, perhaps two. And each of you shall be given a portion of the gold you mine—a fortune for each man in dust and nuggets."

He stopped and waited to see the effect of his words upon Strothers, who had jumped to his feet again.

"Fortune be damned!" he shouted. "I'll earn any fortune I make of my own free will!"

"As you like," the other replied coldly, "but nevertheless you shall remain my prisoner. You must know what would happen had I let any of those men go back to civilization—to the mining camps far to the south. It would bring a stampede, a rush for gold in which I, now unable to work"—he tapped his leg—"would lose another fortune. Do you see now why I must keep you here?

"No one must know of the gold at Manitoupeepagee until such a time as I wish it to be known. You may rest assured you will not be the loser for staying, no matter how much you dislike it." The man's voice became more gentle, and a kindly light came into his eyes. "I wish it had been some one else but you," he concluded. "You're different from the rest."

VIII.

STROTHERS had no time to think over the amazing story, for the old man had lifted himself from his chair and now called the girl.

"I'm ready, Sara," he said.

It was the first time Strothers had heard her name, and he liked it. "Sara," he thought—"a name made for her. Somehow it seemed to describe her, although he could not explain why.

She came into the room with a cap for her uncle, and he picked up his revolver. Sara's, as usual, was in its holster. They waited while Stuart fumbled for his tobacco pouch, and Strothers looked at the girl and for a moment their eyes met.

Slowly the color mounted in her cheeks, and deep in her eyes he saw a great loneliness. Then it was gone, and she quickly turned to the old man, who, with the aid of his stick, was crossing the room. Strothers's heart leaped, and he knew then why it was he had found it so easy to reconcile himself to remaining there as a prisoner. Life took on a new aspect, and when the big man ordered him to walk ahead he moved with surprising willingness.

They left the cabin through the kitchen, and Strothers saw that side of the building for the first time. Directly behind the kitchen was an inclosure, surrounded by a fence of saplings, behind which he saw a number of sled dogs. They were big, wolfish

beasts with black and gray bodies and tawny faces from which wicked yellow eyes looked out at him as he passed. The girl called to them, and they answered with whines as if pleased by the attention.

A trail led directly south from the cabin through heavy pine woods and they walked in silence, Strothers leading, the old man hobbling along behind, with the girl following close on his heels. Strothers was curious to know where he was being taken, and he wondered, too, how a lame old man and a girl could hold six—now seven—men prisoners.

After going for nearly half a mile through the woods they came into a clearing, and Strothers saw before him an enormous bowl-shaped cavity in the earth. At first glance he thought it was an abandoned quarry, but closer inspection showed that the vertical walls of rock were worn smooth as if in ages past it had been the bed of a great pool. The pit was fully seventy-five feet deep and several hundred feet wide.

It was several seconds before Strothers realized that he was standing on the brink of his prison. Then he caught sight of six men working in the shadow of the opposite wall, and as they came running toward the side on which the little group stood looking down Strothers knew they were the missing prospectors.

As old McDonald had said, they were an evil-looking lot, with hard eyes and faces that still bore traces of lives of dissipation. Their hair and beards were long, giving them a wild and savage appearance. The thought of being imprisoned with these men brought a strange uneasiness, but there was no choice, for Stuart had ordered him to a spot where a crude windlass had been erected on the brink of the great bowl.

The girl stood with revolver in hand while the man prepared a sling, and Strothers saw that he was to be lowered into the pit. Just as he dropped slowly over the side Strothers's eyes sought the girl. She was looking at him, and he saw, with a sensation that brought a lump to his throat, that her eyes were filled with tears.

The instant his feet touched bottom Strothers was surrounded by the six men, who all talked at once, pouring forth a flood of questions—who was he; what was the news outside in the mining country?—everything that men isolated from the world for a long time would want to know.

"Thought you had come to get us out of this hell hole," one who Strothers later learned was Tom Ropes growled in disappointed tones. "But now that you are here, come on and look around."

They led him first to the center of the great cavity, and he saw that a stream ran through the place toward the east.

"It comes in there through the rock, and goes out yonder," one of the men told him, with a wave of the hand from west to east.

In the stream the men had built a sluice and cradles for separating the gold from the sand and gravel which covered the bottom of the pit. There were rusty gold pans lying about, too, and narrow shovels hewn from ash.

"Look here," another of the men called. "Ever see anything like that?"

He lifted a small canvas bag from beneath a bush and poured out a handful of gold nuggets. Strothers gasped. He had seen the gold of Alaska and Australia, and he had seen it flowing from the tables in the mills of the rock mining country; but nothing he had ever seen was so rich as this. Then they showed him the finer stuff, yellow dust in the little deer-hide pouches.

"Can't beat that, can you?" the man asked.

"Best I ever saw," Strothers told them. "Never thought there was anything like it in the north or anywhere else."

A cunning look came into the man's eyes and his heavy lips stretched wide in a leering grin as he fondled the little bags of gold.

"And let me tell you, pard," he said, "it's all ours. Don't you think for a minute that old dog is going to make us work down here and take any of it. When the time comes we'll get him right down and put him where he won't do no harm to honest people."

Strothers knew as he listened that the men would show Stuart no mercy if they

got a chance to overpower him, and the thought of what might happen to the girl sent a chill through him.

"Now come on over home," the man went on with a loud laugh in which the others joined.

He led the way to the southeast side of the bowl, where Strothers could see a large archlike opening at the foot of the wall. It was the entrance to a cave, and as they approached he saw that while the mouth was large enough to shelter several men, the tunnel narrowed farther back until, feeling his way along, guided by the men, he finally squeezed through a hole just large enough to allow passage into a great vaulted cavern.

The men had built bunks about the walls of the cave and in the center of the rock-bound room a pile of rocks with flat stones for a top served as a table. In one corner a fireplace had been built, and the pans and tin plates indicated the cooking was done there.

"Couldn't be more comfortable for what you had to work with," Strothers told the other. "How is it in winter?"

"Tight and warm, and cool in summer."

IX.

STROTHERS'S first night in the rocky prison brought a depression which he could not cast aside. He watched the men cook their supper and joined them around the rock table, but ate little. The others talked much, asked many questions, but Strothers was in no mood for conversation, and they noticed it.

"Feeling sorta strange, I reckon," John Gard said. "We all was in the dumps the first night. You'll get over it."

Later, when the men went to their crude bunks, Strothers, stretched on a shelf of the rocky wall, found sleep impossible. His mind was filled with thoughts, groping vainly for the solution of the mystery of his imprisonment. John Stuart had told him much, and the story seemed sincere, yet the conversation of the evening had revealed that the men who came before him had been told nothing.

Tormented by the turmoil of his brain, the man got up and went out into the open.

The mystery of night transformed the pit. To Strothers it seemed the walls that held him prisoner towered straight to the purple curtain of the sky through which the stars sparkled coldly. The scene added to the feeling of despair which held him in its spell, and he paced the dark floor of the pit with nervous strides, hands clasped behind him, head bent in troubled thought.

He hardly noticed the rising of the moon until in its ghostly light he saw his figure, a gigantic shadow man, moving on the wall of rock. Splotches of white light touched the sandy bottom of the bowl, and the stream, which in the darkness had been but a laughing voice to mock his thoughts, became a rippling path of silver, in which the sluice box and the cradles stood out like black skeletons.

He was standing on sand rich in gold, a prisoner with the treasure he had sought so long; riches that would have brought the men of the north rushing in a frenzied stampede. But John Stuart had kept the secret well, and even in his anger Strothers admitted a certain admiration for the boldness of this strange old man.

Although weary after a sleepless night, Strothers joined the men at their work the next day. He shoveled gravel into the sluice trough, which was built in the stream where the water flowed over a little ledge. Part of the flow was directed into the trough, which was made of rough hewn logs. In the bottom deep notches had been cut, and as the water carried the sand and gravel over them the heavy gold and small nuggets settled in the cavities, while the lighter material flowed out of the trough.

The coarse gravel was washed in a cradle, and here Strothers saw the men gathering a harvest of gold in nuggets, some of which were as large as the end of his thumb.

The presence of a new face seemed to cheer the others, and for a few days the work went along smoothly. Close association for a long time, however, had made them irritable. They were suspicious of each other. Trifles that would have passed unnoticed in normal surroundings were magnified until quarrels were frequent, and some-

times they fought it out with bare fists like savages, kicking, punching and slashing until they were exhausted.

Escape was the thought foremost in the minds of the men, and Strothers, too, from the first day in the pit, began seeking some way out of it. He searched every inch of the towering walls of rock, and saw that there was no hope of getting away by scaling them. There was no wood in the place from which to build a ladder or even a single pole, no roots or blades of grass from which to weave a rope.

But planning an escape kept hope alive through the monotonous repetition of days of work that were varied only by the quarrels of the men.

At night when they sat about the cavern the talk was always of escape, and Strothers soon realized that freedom for these six men would mean death for John Stuart and worse for Sara.

" If we could only get out the rest would be a cinch," Tom Ropes said one night. " We could finish off the old man in short order and then "—his eyes would glisten— " the gold, all the gold!"

" And the girl for me," Jim Farrar put in. " I been here the longest, and she's mine when the right time comes."

More than once Strothers was on the point of an outburst of anger when the men spoke of the girl, but he held his emotions in check, realizing that to show his feelings toward her might bring dire consequences. As it was, he felt that the others considered him an outsider. There was nothing to prove his growing conviction, yet he often found himself excluded from their conversations, and more than once he saw them glance at him and whisper.

Day after day the men washed and sorted gravel and sand, filling the little bags with more gold than Strothers had ever thought existed in one place.

" He's got millions of dollars' worth of it," Jim Farrar said one day, " and he's storin' it away somewheres about his place up there."

It was not until he had been there several weeks that Strothers saw that not all the gold went to the old man. He knew Farrar and the others kept a certain portion aside each day and at night it was stored in some hiding place. The fact that it was kept secret convinced him they did not trust him.

The bright spots in Strothers's unhappy days in the pits were Sara's visits to their prison. She came at noon every day to lower food and supplies into the pit. At first she merely glanced at him, but as time went on she spoke about one thing or another.

Then one day she smiled, and Strothers moved about his work as one in a dream. After that she would wave to him when she left, and he thought only of the time she would come that he might see her again.

Jim Farrar was quick to sense Strothers's admiration for the girl, and Strothers, with the blindness of a man in love, did not realize that Farrar noticed the girl's smiles and watched her with passion-fired eyes when she came to the pit.

" Pretty sweet on her, ain't you?" Farrar sneered one day.

" Wouldn't call it that," Strothers answered, restraining his temper with difficulty. " She's a fine girl. Any one would admire her."

Then Strothers realized the dangerous position in which he had placed himself, and saw that Farrar was jealous and considered him a rival. The thought was disquieting, for he knew the other would stop at nothing.

From that time on Strothers noted a change in the attitude of the men. They were surly, and he knew that Farrar was working against him. As long as they were in the pit he could see no great danger for the girl or himself, but he was sure that if an opportunity for escape ever came Farrar would never let him out alive if he could prevent it.

Several times he deliberately picked quarrels with Strothers; but the latter, realizing that it was not only Farrar but all the men he would have to fight in the end, was careful to avoid arguments. He ignored what he knew were studied insults, but more than once he was on the verge of giving vent to his seething rage.

The snow had come early, just as old Jackfish had predicted, and by the end of September more than a foot had fallen. The quickly moving water of the little stream in the pit, however, was proof against the grip of the frost for the time being. The men worked as usual, but it was a bitter task in the wet sand and gravel.

Strothers's heart sank when he thought of spending the winter in the bowl. There would be much idleness when the cold of midwinter forced suspension of mining, and in idleness he saw trouble. The others, too, seemed to dread the coming of the gray days and long nights they faced.

They worked sullenly, talking little, and Strothers sensed something that made him uneasy. There was no doubt that the men disliked him, and he knew that in Jim Farrar a treacherous hatred smoldered, ready to burst into flame on the slightest excuse. The strain of being on guard day and night began to have its effect, and he became nervous and morose; he lay awake for hours and when finally sleep came it was broken by disturbing dreams.

One night late in October, Strothers, worn out by a hard day in the cold water of the stream, sought his bunk earlier than usual, but sleep did not come. For hours he lay listening to the drone of the men's voices while they sat about the cavern talking, as they always did, of escape.

Finally the voices dropped to a whisper, and Strothers, always on the alert, listened breathlessly. He was lying with his face to the rock wall which formed one side of his bunk. Evidently the men thought he was asleep.

"You can't never tell what a woman will do when she likes a man," he heard Jim Farrar whisper. "Now it's plain to see the gal likes him, and I ain't going to take chances much longer. It 'd be just like her to drop a rope down some night and pull him out when we's asleep? Then where'd we fit, I ask you—what about the gold then? And besides, she's mine, and if he gets out she's his—you can see that. Ain't I right?"

There were whispers of assent, and Strothers knew he was the subject of discussion.

"Believe you're right," Bob Allen muttered in low tones. "What you going to do about it?"

For a moment there was silence, and Strothers broke into a cold sweat with the sudden thought that they might suspect he was listening; but Farrar was speaking again.

"Just you leave that to me," he said. "Nobody will know anything when he goes, and what in hell could those two up there do if they did know? It's easy."

"And what's more," Bob Allen suggested guardedly, "I have a sneakin' notion he knows where we hid the gold. Saw him moochin' around the other end of the cave to-night."

Strothers did not know the hiding place of the gold they withheld every day, but he realized that Bob Allen's suspicions would be accepted as fact and put him in even greater danger. He wanted to leap from his bunk and face the men—anything seemed better than lying there with the prospect of a blow on the head at any moment. Farrar's words—everything the men had said—could mean but one thing: he was marked for death.

Minutes seemed hours, but finally Strothers heard the men go to their bunks and for the moment he breathed easier. The night dragged on; he dared not sleep, and finally when it seemed he could stand the strain no longer, dawn came, and the men stirred from their places. He was still in danger, he knew, but daylight brought a comforting sense of greater security; he felt Jim Farrar was not the kind to act in the light.

Work that day was an ordeal for Strothers. Worn out with lack of sleep and the strain of being on guard every moment, he worked like an automaton. Once on pretext of seeking a new location for a cradle, he went to the east end of the bowl and studied the great fissure where the stream roared through the wall.

Had it been large enough he would have risked a plunge into the mysterious darkness that lay beyond. Death in an attempt to escape would be better than waiting to be murdered in cold blood, he thought, but there was no way out through the stream.

Thinking desperately as he worked, Strothers finally struck upon an idea that offered hope of delaying the attack he now felt might come at any time. Every man in the place lived for the day of release. He would play on the hope for escape by pretending to have discovered a possible way out. He felt reasonably sure that as long as he held out such a hope Jim Farrar would make no attack.

He knew they would be suspicious and skeptical, but he knew, too, that so great was their desire for freedom that they would cling to even the faintest hope. He went over the details of his plans carefully, then awaited an opportunity.

During supper in the warm interior of the cavern Strothers appeared unusually cheerful, and he saw at once that the men had noticed the change in him. They were suspicious, and he dared not leave them in doubt too long.

"Boys," he said when they had lighted their pipes, "ever since I've been in this hole I've been trying to find a way out."

A howl of cold laughter greeted his words, but the men leaned forward with eager attention when he went on, deliberately working for the effect he desired.

"Well, I've got a scheme that may work."

They were on their feet in an instant, crowding around him, suddenly friendly, too friendly, but he waved them away with a laugh.

"I am not even sure it will work. I don't want to raise hopes and then disappoint you."

They pleaded, and in Jim Farrar's talk he sensed a threat, but so far the scheme had worked and he felt no fear of attack for the time being.

"Don't believe a damn word of it," John Gard growled sullenly.

"Me neither," Toby Smith agreed.

"You can bet your hide that if they was any way out of this hole I'd 'a' found it long before this," Jim Farrar snapped.

"Didn't ask you to believe it," Strothers said coolly, adding with just enough show of spirit to stir their hopes again: "In school I studied a lot about hydraulics —the power of water. Did you fellows ever think of using that stream to get out of here?"

"Damn fool notion that is," Farrar growled. "You can't get out through the stream."

"No, not as it stands," Strothers went on, noting with satisfaction that every man was listening intently; "but suppose the outlet was blocked and the water began to fill the pool. If we could work that out, we'd be free."

The attitude of the men changed instantly.

"By the great horned owl!" Moses exclaimed. "When can we do it?"

Strothers smiled. "Not for awhile yet, and I'm not sure that it can be done at all. I've got to do some figuring on the amount of water coming in and find out the exact size of the pit. Then, if I get that right, we ought to be able to calculate how long it would take to fill. Just give me time to work this thing out."

"Time!" bellowed Tom Ropes in cheerful tones. "Man alive, you can take all the time you want. We'll work the stream, and you work a way out of this hole. How about it, boys?"

Greatly cheered by the new hope of escape and thought of what it would mean to them, the men agreed with a shout.

"All right, that's good enough," Strothers said with a smile. "To-morrow I'll begin measuring the wall and do some figuring on the stream. It's going to be a slow job."

When the time came for the men to go to their bunks Strothers noticed that John Gard remained by the fire smoking. He was prepared for that, however. From the first he knew that once having raised their hopes for escape, the first fear of the men would be that he might try it alone, leaving them to their fate.

The success of his plan was even greater than he had dared to hope, and Strothers felt secure from attack for the time being. Relieved of the anxiety of constantly being on guard, he quickly fell into a long and refreshing sleep.

X.

DAWN broke cold and gray. The air was motionless, filled with a peculiar chill, and

overhead an ominous, blue-gray haze curtained the sky as far as the eye could see. Even the snow in the great bowl seemed to have lost some of its whiteness, and the tops of the tall pines towering close to the edge of the pit were still black splotches against the sky.

"Blizzard before long, sure as hell," Jim Farrar predicted, gazing into the north. "Knew it was about due. That's a mean sky."

Snow began falling during the morning, big flakes dropping straight out of the gray sky through the still air. Not a sound except the clatter of the wooden spades on the sluice box and the rattle of gravel over the cleats of the cradle broke the heavy hush which hung over the wilderness. Soon the snow fell faster and a breeze came out of the north. At noon a wind was blowing, and when the men came back from their dinner the air was filled with fine snow, flying out of the north on the wings of a gale.

Work was impossible, and for a time they stood well back in the entrance to the cave, watching the storm.

"Blizzard, and no mistake," muttered Toby Smith. "She'll lay down a foot of it by night and this hole will be drifted to the top. Some shovelin' ahead, I reckon."

All afternoon the storm raged with a fury that swept snow deep into the entrance to the cave, and the men were forced to close the narrow opening to their "living room." Late in the day they went out to clear the entrance, for, as Smith had predicted, it was almost filled with drifting snow. They shoveled in silence until a way had been opened.

"Good enough," Jim Farrar shouted, and the men threw their shovels in a corner and stood looking out into the storm from the shelter of the cave.

They were gazing toward the north, and the edge of the pit showed dimly through the white smother. Beyond, Strothers could see the tops of the pines, now flattened in the gale, swaying in wide arcs before the merciless blast; now twisting convulsively, and, in the lulls between gusts, nodding uneasily. The savagery of the battle of the elements in which the things of the wilderness were pitted against the fury of the blizzard fascinated him.

As he watched his eyes fixed on one great tree. It was bending more than the others, swaying perilously near the breaking point. Suddenly the top of the tree was whipped by a violent gust, and he saw the big pine bend down, down, slowly down, until with a rending of fibers it toppled into the pit and hung suspended from its splintered stump.

Even as the tree fell, Strothers, his eyes fixed upon it as if hypnotized, saw a chance for escape. Before the wide green top had ceased its tossing from the fall, he was racing through the storm across the snow of the bowl.

The men huddled in the entrance saw the tree crash, and while they were not so quick to grasp the opportunity it held, the instant Strothers leaped out into the storm they knew his object, and they dashed after him.

"Get him!" Jim Farrar shouted. "Get him! Get him! Knock him down!"

But Strothers had the advantage of a few seconds' start, and he was a quarter of the distance across the bottom of the pit before the others got started.

Running was difficult, for the snow was heavy and deep and under it was the slippery crust of the old snow. Once he stumbled, but caught himself and dashed on. As he neared the north side where the tree hung, he saw that the top dangled some eight feet above the ground and that he would have to jump if he was to save himself.

Then the training of his days on the track in college came back instinctively, and he changed his pace like a runner about to make a high jump. Nearer and nearer he flashed, judging the distance as he ran, until just before he came to the tree he launched upward into the air and his hands grasped a limb of the tree. Almost at the same instant Jim Farrar dashed under him.

The other men were close on his heels, shouting with oaths, but Strothers, driven to desperate energy by the thought of what would happen to him if he fell into their clutches, quickly climbed above the branches of the tree, and, twining his legs about

the rough trunk, began the long climb upward.

He felt the tree sag several inches, and he knew one of the men had been hoisted into the branches and was following. Foot by foot he fought his way upward toward the edge, which in his desperate struggle seemed so far away. His hands were torn by the rough bark and his knees ached from the strain of gripping the trunk as he clutched it for a new hitch upward.

Finally when he felt he could not hold on an instant longer he saw the edge of the rock just above his head and at last he pulled himself over the rim and lay in the snow, gasping for breath. But it was for only a moment that he rested, for a glance over the edge showed him the struggling form of Jim Farrar less than twenty feet beneath him. The man was climbing with desperate tenacity, and the men below shouted encouragements, urging haste.

Strothers leaped to his feet and ran, skirting the edge of the bowl until he could see the windlass. Although the trail was buried deep under the new snow, he struggled northward and was relieved to find the opening in the woods where the trail came into the clearing.

Looking back, he saw that Jim Farrar, instead of following him, had run to the windlass and was already working at it. Soon the other men would be hoisted from the pit, and Strothers shuddered at the thought of what might happen when they were all free.

There would be no mercy for the old man, and as for Sara— The thought lent speed to his feet, and he plunged on through the snow until the cabin loomed out of the storm ahead. He pounded on the door with his fists, but it was several seconds before it was opened, and the girl stood there with her revolver ready.

"Quick!" Strothers gasped. "The men are getting out of the pit. They won't stop at anything now!"

A groan came from the corner in which John Stuart sat, and Strothers turned in time to see him struggling to his feet. The man had aged in the weeks since he had seen him. His erstwhile ruddy face was lined with heavy furrows.

Strothers could see he was very ill, but when he spoke the great voice filled the cabin with its rumbling. He was standing by his chair, supporting himself with one hand. His eyes were half closed, and again Strothers saw a glint in them like the touch of the sun on glare ice.

"They won't dare come here," he roared, "for I am Manitoupeepagee—I am the Devil of the Lake!"

Then he dropped back to his seat, bewildered, terrified.

"My gold! My gold!" he shouted. "They must not get my gold!"

The girl was moving swiftly about the room, and Strothers saw that she was lifting heavy log shutters over each window. He hurried to help her, and when they had covered the four windows in the big room three heavy bars were placed across the door. The kitchen windows were then covered and the door barred as in the front room.

The girl looked about. "Everything tight," she said calmly.

Strothers wondered whether she realized the seriousness of the situation, but her next remark convinced him that she did.

"It had to come some day," she said. "Now it's a battle for life. They will kill if they can. Farrar threatened that many times; and once"—she hesitated for a moment—"he said he'd take me."

Strothers nodded. "I know all that," he said, looking down at her, "but he won't get you."

He wanted to take her in his arms, to reassure her, but there was no time now for such thought.

"How many guns have we?" he asked.

"Three rifles and two revolvers, besides the gun you had when you first came," she told him. "But we have only eight cartridges left. They are for uncle's revolver. Pete, the Indian who brings our supplies, was due with more yesterday or to-day, but he must be storm-bound on the trail, probably a few miles out. You see, I used all the ammunition we had in getting game to keep the men in the pit supplied—even your rifle cartridges went."

"That isn't very encouraging," Strothers said, but his voice did not betray the sen-

sation that came with the news. Then like a swift blow it dawned on him that they faced even a more desperate situation.

"You say Pete should have been here by now?" he asked.

"Yes; he generally arrives on time."

"Do you realize what may happen?" Strothers asked.

The girl was thoughtful for several seconds, then looked at him.

"You mean the men may stop Pete and take his gun and the ammunition?"

Strothers nodded and for a time stood thinking.

"That means we must leave here to-night," he said with quick decision. "They will watch the cabin, and the chances of Pete coming through are slim. As long as they are unarmed we have a good chance, but if they get his gun and the ammunition we are trapped. They could hold us indefinitely. We've got to get out to-night—the sooner the better."

The possibilities of the situation were even more disquieting than Strothers let the girl know, and a sudden fear for her safety gripped him.

"You have the dogs and a sled," he said.

"Yes, but the sled is cached in the woods several hundred feet beyond the dog yard—just off the trail to the pit."

"I'll get it," he said, "and we'll bring it into the front room and load it there. Then we could get the dogs in, if you think you can handle them there, and when the time comes get out with a rush. There's no time to be lost."

With Stuart's black revolver in his hand, Strothers slipped out the kitchen door into the storm and felt his way past the dog yard, where he was greeted by suspicious snarls, and after a few minutes' search found the sled cached on a platform between four trees. He had pulled it to the ground and was turning toward the cabin when he saw a figure creeping stealthily toward him through the snow.

"If you come a step nearer I'll shoot!" he shouted to make himself heard through the storm.

The figure continued to come on, and Strothers saw that it was Farrar. He fired low at the man's legs, and the other went down in the snow, cursing Strothers savagely.

"I'll get you!" he shrieked in rage and pain. "I'll even this up!"

Knowing that the man's companions would soon find him, Strothers hurried back to the cabin with the sled. The girl was waiting in the kitchen door, white-faced and trembling.

"I heard the shot," she cried. "I—I was afraid something had happened to you." She was clinging to his arm.

"They're watching us," he told her. "I came across Farrar out by the sled cache, and I had to shoot. That will make them more desperate than ever. He saw the sled and will know we are preparing to leave. We must hurry."

Before they went back to the front room Sara called Strothers to one side.

"I'm worried about him," she said, nodding toward the other room. "His mind has not been quite right for more than a year, and now he is very ill. Excitement may have a bad effect, for he thinks only of his gold."

"We'll tell him our plans as calmly as possible," Strothers replied. "It's the only thing to do. We can't stay here. He can ride on the sled."

Darkness had long since fallen over the forest. The storm still raged and the cabin trembled under the fury of its blasts; and from outside came the roar of the wind in the trees and the swish of dry snow on the window panes.

John Stuart sat in his chair, silent except for the sound of labored breathing. His face was drawn and weary as if time had hurried on to lay the burden of many years upon him. The news that they must leave that night brought the old man struggling to his feet in a frenzy of excitement.

"The gold!" he cried. "We must stay by the gold! I won't go!"

Strothers quietly explained the danger of staying, but Stuart was obdurate.

"Well, then, we'll take as much gold as we can on the sled," he told him, hoping that such an inducement would please the other. Still the old man refused.

"No!" he roared with sudden anger. "We'll stay with the gold!"

"And if we do, we'll lose the gold and our lives as well," Strothers retorted, disclosing his fear that the men would waylay Pete and seize the supply of ammunition.

Finally Stuart nodded. "You're right," he said. "Some gold is better than none. Get it now—quickly!"

Sara quickly lifted several short logs from the center of the cabin floor, and Strothers saw a ladder leading down to a hole beneath, but it was not until he had descended by the light of a candle that he realized that the cabin was built over a large cave.

On one side he saw rows of the familiar little deerskin bags which were used to store the fine gold. On the other, food was stored on shelves of flattened logs.

He passed up bags of gold to Sara until enough to fill two packsacks were piled on the cabin floor.

"That's all we can carry," Strothers told the old man. "It's going to be a load as it is, with the outfit on top."

John Stuart's eyes moved from Strothers to the girl and then back to the man. He was fumbling in his vest pocket and finally brought forth his big gold watch. Opening the back, he lifted out a small square of folded paper and held it out to the girl.

"In case anything happens," he said, "I want you to have this. And now I'd like to be alone for a little while to think."

When they came back from the kitchen a little later John Stuart was lying, face down, across his treasured bags of gold, his long arms outstretched as if to gather them to him. Even before Strothers reached him he knew the deep voice would never again echo in the cabin, for John Stuart had died close to the thing he loved best in life.

Shocked by the suddenness of his going, Sara stood as if in a trance for several minutes, gazing dry-eyed at the man whose will had dominated her life since childhood.

She did not weep, as Strothers feared she would, for the discipline of years held her emotions in check. The paleness of her face was the only sign that was shaken by the ordeal.

Suddenly she thought of the bit of paper the old man had given her, and now she unfolded it.

"It's a map," she told Strothers, "showing where the rest of the gold is cached." She turned it over and read something scribbled on one corner. Slowly her eyes lifted until they were looking into Strothers's.

"He gives it all to you and me," she said quietly; "the gold here was for the men."

"And they can have it," Strothers answered quickly. "It would only make it harder for the dogs. We can come back for the rest when all is safe."

John Stuart's death raised a new problem, which was solved when, after talking it over, Strothers suggested that they lay him for his last sleep in the cave beneath the cabin.

It was long after midnight, the storm had ceased, and all was silent when Strothers at last filled the old man's grave in the white sand on the floor of the cave.

"We must hurry," Strothers warned when they had replaced the logs that hid the opening to the cave. "There's not a second to be lost." He peered through a crack in the heavy shutter over the kitchen window, and saw a faint, red glow in the forest toward the bowl.

"Just as I thought," he exclaimed. "They've built a fire and probably rigged a shelter in the clearing, and now that it has stopped snowing they are no doubt watching us."

For more than an hour Sara and the man worked with feverish haste gathering the things they would need in their dash for safety. While the girl packed the blankets and rolled the tent, Strothers got down her snowshoes and a pair of the old man's from the loft above the kitchen.

Several times Strothers stopped to make a round of the cabin, peering through the shutters, but he saw no signs of the men.

"That shot at Farrar made them cautious," he remarked, "but they must know we are going to leave. How are we fixed?"

"All ready," she said, "except to put on our things. "Here, put these deerskin socks on next your skin. It'll be hard enough without *mal racquette*." Strothers had suffered the agony of aching muscles

after hard travel on snowshoes and he knew the value of deerskin socks to prevent chafing. The girl had already put on her moccasins and now she pulled on a rabbit-skin coat.

"Put this on," she told him, offering a great pilot cloth jacket which Strothers knew had been worn by her uncle. "Now lay out the harness on the floor and we'll get the dogs."

With revolver ready, Strothers unbarred the back door and stood by the girl while she opened the gate to the yard. The dogs rushed out, leaping about her with whines of delight, but she quickly quieted them, and they followed her into the cabin. There she was forced to bring her long driving whip into play to make them take their places. Finally each was squatting on his haunches, while Strothers and the girl worked with desperate haste, adjusting the harness.

At last the task was finished. Every lace was tied, the dogs were straight in their traces, and Keo, the great lead dog, sat on his haunches full of the pride of first position.

The snowshoes were laced and Strothers was making a last inspection of the thongs which held the load on the sled when he saw Keo's tawny muzzle lift quickly and the dog slowly moved his nose in a wide arc, the trick of a wolf getting a scent. Suddenly he was on his feet, growling, every hair of his wiry mane bristling.

"Some one coming, he knows!" Sara said in a tense whisper.

Strothers pulled the revolver from the holster at his side and moved quietly into the kitchen. The air was crystal clear now, and the moon was shining, revealing the forest in sharp contrast to the newly fallen snow. Trees near the edge of the clearing were distinctly outlined, and as Strothers watched breathlessly for several moments he saw a dim figure move stealthily from behind one and run to the protection of another. And then another and another figure showed itself against the snow until he knew that five men were lurking there in the shadows.

"They're coming!" he told the girl, who was standing close behind him.

He jerked a strip of chinking from between two logs and thrust the black muzzle of his revolver through the hole.

"Now go back to the front," he whispered. "Put out the light, get the dogs ready, and the moment you hear me fire, unbar the door and start them. I'll be with you by the time you get out."

Ten minutes passed and Strothers watched the shadowy figures working nearer to the edge of the clearing in which the cabin stood. One man was ahead of the others and Strothers kept his eyes on him until suddenly something in his hand glinted in the moonlight and the outline of a gun barrel showed plainly for a moment.

He saw the story behind that—Pete, the Indian, snow-bound near the cabin, had started on as soon as the storm was over. The rest was plain.

There was no time to warn the girl. Strothers waited for the man with the gun to come closer. Again the moonlight glinted on the breech of the weapon and Strothers fired at the glistening spot.

The rifle flew into the air, and in the instant before he turned to join the girl he saw the man wringing one hand. Whether his shot had broken the breech-block, as he hoped it would, Strothers could not tell, but for the moment the man was disarmed and the time to make their dash had come.

Even as he turned, clutching the smoking revolver, he heard the front door open, and as Sara uttered the command, *"Marche! Marche!"* there was a scuffling of padded feet, the click of nails on the floor, and the team rushed into the open as Strothers came into the room, his snowshoes thumping as he hurried out.

The girl was on the sled, as they had planned, and the dogs were already trotting down the trail when Strothers caught up with the long strides of a man who knows his snowshoes. The girl passed him the whip and at its sharp crack the team broke into a long lope. They were rushing down the trail toward the lake, and Strothers jumped on benind as the sled gathered speed.

"Hold on!" he warned the girl. "We can gain time by crossing the lake. The ice looks heavy enough to take us."

Strothers shouted a command and the big wheel dog skillfully pulled to the right, while the man tugged at the gee-pole. The heavy sled tilted on one runner for a moment, then righted and sped away down the slope to the gleaming surface of the lake, swept clear of snow by the gale.

They were less than fifty feet out on the frozen surface when something clicked on the ice in front of them, and at the same instant the sharp report of a rifle rang out from the hill behind.

Strothers, riding behind on the runners, sent the lash of the whip flying over the running team, and the eight dogs quickened their pace until, with bodies straight and ears flat, they were racing over the smooth surface.

"Out of range, and safe!" Strothers exclaimed when Keo led the team off the ice into the forest on the east side of Manitoupeepagee. "They can't follow without snowshoes, and while they might use Pete's, it's not likely one of them will take a chance. Guess we're safe enough now—but it was close."

Once in the shelter of the woods, they stopped to give the hard running team a brief rest. The panting dogs dropped to the snow, and together Strothers and Sara went to the edge of the forest.

They looked back in silence across the glistening sheet of Manitoupeepagee to the crest of the great cliff, dimly outlined against the paling sky, then turned their faces to the east again. Only Keo, the lead dog, ever on the alert, saw him bend and kiss her.

THE END

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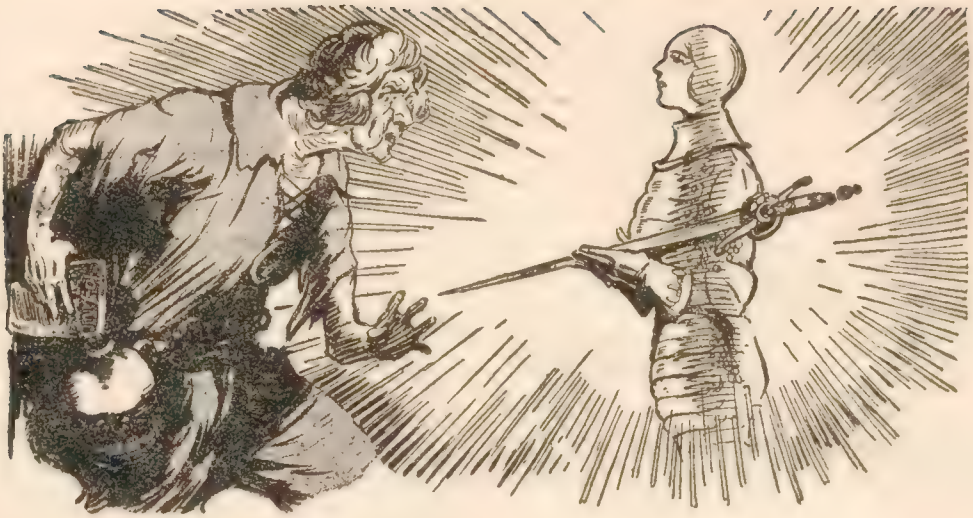
SUPERFICIAL

I WILL not break my heart with grief
Because my lover's gone—
I know the ebon hills are touched
With crystal in the dawn!
Infatuation always fails
Until it touches mind;
Our love was such a fragile thing
With spirits bound and blind.

He viewed the curtain of my soul—
He glimpsed the altar there,
But when he tried to rend its folds,
He found they wouldn't tear;
And if he didn't know or care
To try to use the key,
I'm glad at least to know he left
The sanctity to me.

I will not break my heart—ah, no!
I'll weave a little rune
Whose subtle threads of loveliness
Will make me happy soon!
Perhaps some sadness is my meed,
But not a tear shall fall!
I cannot feel complete despair
Unless I lose my all!

Sonia Ruthèle Novák.



The Scarlet Tide

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "Queen of the Night," "Sundown Café," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

IN the year 1707, Pierre the Drowner, a notorious pirate of the Spanish Main, captures a merchantman and puts to death all aboard but the skipper's young wife. This woman, who is about to become a mother, is deeply religious and prays for the sinful souls of the living freebooters. She dies in a hurricane after the birth of a daughter, Joan. Old Pierre repents of his crimes and becomes a God-fearing hermit on the Island of Barataria in the Gulf of Mexico. He surrenders little Joan to become the adopted daughter of M. Louis de Bresse, a proud and wealthy Creole of New Orleans. De Bresse has disinherited his own son, Thomas, as a drunkard and brawler. Rumors come to Pierre that the British are about to attack New Orleans, and he hastens to inform De Bresse, who is ardently loyal to the American government. An Englishman of fashion, calling himself Dr. Bromley, calls on the Creole gentleman with recommendations from a French nobleman in Paris, and De Bresse gives him haven. Three American soldiers arrive to notify De Bresse that the Englishman is a spy; they demand to know his whereabouts.

CHAPTER VI.—(*Continued*)

THE SPY.

NOW, Louis de Bresse, it is my belief, recalled how that these soldiers had already learned from the slave who kept the gate that two men had come to visit him.

So he explained the matter thus:

"My daughter attended the ball of Don Vicento Estevan to-night. And returned with one of her suitors. Two others called here in search of him shortly afterwards. On what errand, I know not."

"What were their names, *monsieur?*"

"I cannot give you their names as I am of the opinion that they search for my daughter's suitor in the pursuance of an affair of honor."

Thus was the deputy satisfied. He apologized again profusely for his intrusion at this late hour of the night, bowed and departed. And likewise the two soldiers followed him out.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 19.

Now I wondered greatly in my heart over this thing. For I saw that Louis de Bresse held the honor of hospitality so high—and likewise the duty that he owed because of that letter from his friend the Comte de Rougecroix—that he even shielded a spy who had taken refuge in his house!

But I bethought me further: What sort of honor is it that holds hospitality even above the duty towards one's country? And I marveled that De Bresse should do this thing. But I might have known that if he was so honorable in the one thing, he would surely be exacting in the other. And I fell to wondering how he would satisfy this other, higher duty—I mean, toward his country.

Mark you how he did this. And his manner of satisfying both demands—that of hospitality, and that of his country, showed in my mind that Louis de Bresse was as honorable a man as ever I have met.

When the soldiers were gone, that rapscallion Bromley came from behind the arras where he had hidden. And he stood there now as proud a figure as was ever seen by mortal man. Yea, I might say truthfully he was as proud as those woven semblances of Francis the First and his courtiers hunting with the falcon—on that tapestry which was the background to Bromley's handsome figure.

"M. de Bresse," so spake Dr. Bromley, rogue and dissembler that he was, "I have been grossly calumniated!"

But the host held up his waxen hand. His lips were blue as were his finely chiseled features—with most consuming anger. It was as if flames of passion had consumed him and left him like ashes.

"Permit me to speak," M. de Bresse said quietly. "I must exonerate my own act in shielding you under my roof. Else what I have done will seem traitorous. How you obtained a letter from my friend the Comte de Rougecroix, I know not. Nor do I care. My duty is the same whether or not my friend presumed upon my hospitality in this matter. He begged me to harbor you, and so I have. But I shall not free you now."

Then did Dr. Bromley's mouth curl to a sneer. Was it possible—so I have no doubt he thought—that this old man was going to make an attempt upon his life—after protecting him from those American soldiers?

But mark what De Bresse did:

"I do not propose, sir, to keep you prisoner—nor do I propose ever to turn you over to the American authorities. But sir, there is one honorable course left for me to take. And I take it now: *Dr. Bromley, I do hereby challenge you to a duel to the death!*"

I consider now that during this scene, which I remember as clearly as if it were enacted last night—that in all their words and deeds, Louis de Bresse did not at any time offer his guest insult, nor so much as hurl that miserable epithet "a spy" at him.

Nor did he give any cause or insult over which the duel might have been fought. As, for instance, the act of throwing a glass of wine into his guest's face.

This challenge he uttered in the same polite tone—and his voice, trembling though it was, was not lifted.

But this Dr. Bromley—and likewise I, myself—knew the tone of that voice to mean one thing: A duel must be fought, and no persuasion on my part, and no evasion on the part of this rogue Bromley, could have changed De Bresse's purpose.

And so it was ordained. And I suppose that Bromley, who had but a few moments before been delivered from certain death at the hands of those three soldiers, was not greatly relieved that he had no more serious sentence passed upon him but that he must stand up before this old and frail man.

I saw then that the light came back to Bromley's eyes, and his lips stiffened.

But he said as if in triumph:

"M. de Bresse, I accept your challenge. And I shall accept such conditions, such weapons and whatsoever field, you may designate."

CHAPTER VII.

HONOR.

NOW one thing else must I set down in this chronicle before I recount the duel to the death which took place between M. Louis de Bresse and this Englishman, Dr. Bromley. One thing took

place that night, and covered the span of perhaps a few seconds. But it was that span of time which forever has been most pregnant in the affairs of men: I mean the time which elapses as a man is about to drink—even that moment between the cup and the lip!

For Dr. Bromley raised his glass of Madeira—not to drink a toast. For what was there to toast now, but his own perfidy? One thing perhaps he might have pledged—and that was his desire for the success of the British invasion. For would he not then have been master of this house to treat the slaves of M. de Bresse as his own; to take his daughter prisoner! to pillage the house of all its priceless garnishments?

I am of the opinion that these thoughts went through Dr. Bromley's mind as he was about to refresh himself with that goblet of Madeira. For he raised his eyes hungrily, as if imagining himself already the master of that splendid Creole mansion.

And as he raised his hand, behold! He saw a vision of loveliness draped in that fashion which I believe was an Empire gown such as was worn by the ladies of Napoleon's court. But being a seaman I have no sense concerning these things; only this I know, that the vision he saw was lovely beyond any picture ever painted by Goya or Chaudet or Baron Guérin or such other artists as were the rage at this time. And when I was young I had an eye for paintings of this sort—and had filched many from cathedral or Mexican hacienda in my expeditions.

But never had I seen a picture so marvelous as this—which indeed was not a picture at all but the living flesh. For Joan, who had heard something of the clipclop of horses' feet, the clanking of spurs upon the flagstone in the patio, the slaves scurrying this way and that among palms and rubber and magnolia clumps, had come down from her room. Behold her, as she stands upon the grand staircase with soft beams of candelabra flooding up to caress her face!

And Dr. Bromley—so I noticed—had held the cup from his lip and, open-mouthed, seemed to drink in something that was far more intoxicating than that Madeira!

Joan—innocent child that she was, smiled upon this handsome dandy who had come to visit her guardian at such an hour.

And Dr. Bromley smiled in return and his eyes burst into flame.

But Louis de Bresse, seeing this usual duel of coquettish glances preceding the duel to the death that Bromley and he were to fight in the very next hour, was wroth. And he spoke sharply to his daughter, saying:

"Have I not told you, child, to retire to your room and pack your effects for our journey tomorrow?"

"But I wish to receive our charming guest," the young girl replied. "Am I not hostess in this house?"

Then did Louis de Bresse know that she had not heard what had actually occurred, so he was glad, for by no means would he have her know what was about to take place. So he said:

"Return to your room, my child!"

"But why am I not to meet our guest!" she pouted.

"Because already you have disobeyed me!" her father said in anger.

Now this was a strange explanation for so serious a breach; and Joan perhaps was puzzled that her father should refuse before the guest's very face to introduce him to the daughter of the house. So she pouted more and her eyes flashed angrily, but to avoid any further scene in the presence of a guest, she lifted the filmy train of her robe, and turned upward toward her room.

But as she went from the candlelight into the darkness above, she cast one more look at the handsome dandy who stood worshipfully below. And her look was like a beam of candle light itself, coming from a dark place.

So this elegant knave, Dr. Bromley bowed. Then when she was gone, he tossed off his glass of wine and, for the first time since he had found himself in jeopardy, a bright color came back to his smooth shaven cheeks.

What field could Louis de Bresse designate for the consummation of that most fatal and tragic affair? He could not choose that space in front of the Orleans

theatre, where under the lantern of the house since that day many a Creole has satisfied his honor. Nor could they retire—as was the custom of Creole swordsmen to that most fashionable of fencing establishments—Ponton's.

For this was an affair to be kept secret from all men. Nor could they transact this business upon the levee, for the moon was now arisen, and there were soldiers on guard.

So it was that M. de Bresse designated a space of ground which was near the St. Louis Cemetery, surrounded by oaks. And by reason of the long curtains of Spanish moss hanging from the branches this place was sequestered from all view. He designated me as his second in this affair and ordered that the carriage be got ready. He commanded further that should his daughter hear the departure of horses and men and the carriage, that she be comforted.

"Tell her that I will return at dawn and knock upon her door—and that she must be ready."

So it happened that an old negress went to her and, as I learned later, the negress must have told some lie or other concerning the departure, for Joan knew nothing of the events that were coming to pass.

Thus we rode from under the *porte-cochère*—M. de Bresse and myself in his carriage; with a negro hostler in livery; whilst the adversary, Bromley, and his ill-favored servant followed close behind in saddle. Nor did any of the *serenos* who guard the streets of the city after nightfall stop us, for seeing the carriage of M. de Bresse, they knew that our mission must be a just one.

Now, it is definitely my opinion that Bromley and his companion would have made off into the cypress marsh without any further meddling in this dangerous business. For what cared they for a matter of honor, when they were already engaged in so dishonorable a business and when their lives were forever in jeopardy?

Perhaps the ill-favored man with the bulging spectacles even suggested to his master that they put spurs to their horses and truck no more about so ridiculous a matter as a duel. Indeed, I heard him in earnest argument with his master as they rode behind us. But what his words were I could only guess.

And it is my opinion that the master—varlet that he was—would most surely have ridden off and laughed M. de Bresse and his challenge to scorn, except that he wished to kill him. And why? For no other reason—so I argued with myself—but that he had seen that beautiful girl on the grand staircase in the De Bresse house.

He might have argued, rightly enough, that De Bresse, being an old man, was no great adversary. He might likewise have argued further: If M. de Bresse were killed, then he would be out of the way, and it would be that much simpler for Bromley to pay court to the girl.

These villainous machinations must have been working in the Englishman's mind as he followed us to the duelling ground. For otherwise I am certain he would not have bothered himself any more about De Bresse and his fine points of honor.

So it was that the duel came to pass. And the slave hostler held the long coat of Louis de Bresse, and the short-legged varlet held the coat of Dr. Bromley. And the men rolled up their fine linen sleeves which otherwise reached to their finger-tips, while I held out a case in which were two duelling pistols.

And the men faced each other and saluted, and turned with back to back, and on a signal walked the number of paces agreed upon. Both turned simultaneously and fired.

Now in my concern for the life of my friend, Louis de Bresse, I could not tell just what it was that so astonished my eyes. For even though I had seen many men fall with wounds, and moreover had sent many men into the Hereafter by my own hand, my heart beat like a bird's as I saw the flashes of light from those pistols.

Perhaps in my confusion I saw things that were not; but I can swear by the Eternal God even to this day, that there were not two flashes of light in that moonlit gloom among those moss-hung oaks—but that there were three. The third came from where I did not know, except that presently

I saw a man running for his horse—and it was no other than the ill-favored varlet who had covered his arm with his master's coat.

And it is my belief now—after cogitating over this matter many a time—that that varlet had a pistol of his own hidden beneath the coat on his arm, and that, stepping away just far enough so that a curtain of Spanish moss hid him, he fired a shot an instant before the two duellists turned.

But as for my ears, I could distinguish not three shots but only two. For De Bresse—even though an old man, was a quick one, and his shot and the shot from his rightful adversary, Bromley, were fired as one.

And when they fired, the two stood silently, so that the draperies of looming oak, the skeins of mist, the blue gloom of moonlight filtering upon them, made the duellists seem not as men but as the ghosts of men.

Then did my noble friend, Louis de Bresse, sink to his knees—as a ghost returning noiselessly to the turf from which it had arisen.

Dr. Bromley, casting his pistol upon the ground, moved off—as silently as an apparition stalking, and presently he mounted his horse and rode away. His varlet henchman came from out some thicket or other and joined him, and the two vanished in a cypress swamp.

But by this time I knelt beside my fallen comrade, and behold! a ball had struck his chest and torn the satin stock that was about this throat, and stained the white linen of his shirt. And I saw that the wound was most surely a mortal wound and that his moments upon this earth were numbered.

So the slave coachman helped me take him to the carriage and we drove back to Dauphine Street. But before we came to the house we went into Bourbon Street, where at the corner of St. Anthony's Alley is the cabin cell of Père Antoine—a man who walked with God—and he came with us to the house to shrive the noble soul of this dying man.

And when we arrived I dispatched a slave for a surgeon, but I knew that this was of no great import.

Thus we went in, and the dawn was just come. So I myself went up to tell Joan of what had come into her life.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAID AND THE SWORD.

WHAT must Joan de Bresse have thought when that knock came upon her door at dawn?

Had not her father given her to understand that at dawn he himself would come, and that she must be ready? Ready for what? A great adventure!

And it was plain to be seen that during those hours she had prepared herself for the flight—an occupation that was play! Yea, it was a new sort of play, far more exciting than preparing herself—as she had done so many a time—to attend some ball or other, or to be a queen of this carnival or that.

I suppose that the most exciting moments in the life of any Creole lass are those in which she puts on the robes of a Mardi Gras queen. But they were not so exciting as the moments when Joan put on her riding costume to go forth as a fugitive into a new life.

And, indeed, she had robed herself for a new life. For childhood and the care-free life of a Creole belle were vanished into the past, never again to return. For only a few moments more was Joan to be the petted child of the rich Creole, Louis de Bresse.

I saw her in that costume. How regal she was! For she had grown to be a slim girl and of the beauty that belongs to queens. Her riding habit was a crimson velvet—according to the style affected, as is known, by the wives of Napoleon's generals. Thus when a lady rode in those days, she rode as if to a court ball, with feathers in her hat and a fan in lieu of riding whip.

But when Joan saw me at the door, she started back in surprise. For she had expected to open to the knock of her father—an elegant gentleman. Whereas, instead, she saw an old Baratarian with shaggy mane of white hair and fisherman's rags.

So she said: "Did he send even you, M. Pirate, to summon me?"

And I nodded, saying: "But yes, Joan, he sent me to summon you."

Then her heart leaped within her, I suppose, for she flushed with excitement and said merrily: "See what I have chosen to take with me on my journey, M. Pirate."

And she pointed to the great bed, so that under the canopy of mosquito baire, I saw what was dearest to her heart:

"My gowns, M. Pirate, of percale and china silk, all my scarfs of muslin and chiffon, all that I possess; for with such gowns as we wear these days one cannot go without a scarf! And look at the satin trousers which are a very sensible style! Particularly for this flight of ours.

"And how many bonnets do you think I shall need? Poke bonnets in winter are the thing. And here is a beehive, and a Polish fly cap and a Gipsy bonnet. And a casquette which would be nice for riding!"

Now all this time I had not the heart to interrupt her joyous prattle. For it would have been like breaking the dream of a little child. But the moments were precious, and so I said:

"Joan, your father is going on another journey, and he is calling for you."

She gave me a look then of childish scorn, as if to say: "You are only an old smuggler from Barataria, and know nothing of these matters. You are not of the élite, so why should I tell you about my bonnets?"

But it must have been that the girl saw a strange light in my eye. And being quick to read men's eyes—in which occupation no doubt she had had much practice—she cried out to me:

"What has happened, *monsieur?* Why were you sent to my room instead of some slaves? Why did not my father himself come, as he promised? And what do you mean by this other journey? Quick, *monsieur,* answer me!"

And she took hold of my tattooed hand, and looked up with a great fright in her eyes.

Then did it fall upon me to do what all my life I had vowed never to do—to cause this child unhappiness. But I said:

"Joan—your father—who is the most noble man in the whole world——"

But my voice broke, and she put her fair hand upon my bowed shoulders, and when I saw that she was strong of spirit I told her all.

No tongue of man can tell what torture of spirit I was in when I told her that this rascal Bromley had killed her adoptive father. For was not I myself the man who had killed her *own* father?

Thus when I told her of this knave's deed and the wrong he had done to her, I thought how much greater wrong had I myself done her, when the father who begat her was killed by one of my own crew many years before on the deck of that brig which I had engaged in pirate battle.

Thus did fate bring it to pass to call me to account for the worst of my crimes. Thus did the Eternal Lord flay my very soul.

And as the girl wept and reviled the man who had done so foul a deed as to kill De Bresse, I thought that in truth she was reviling me. Though she knew not that I writhed under every word she uttered—for I prayed God she would never know that I had done a deed a thousand times more fell than this murderous Bromley.

I gave thanks that her words were few—for we came immediately to De Bresse's door.

And there was the master of the mansion lying upon his deathbed, with a cloud of baires drawn like regal canopy away by slaves. There was the surgeon who, upon seeing us, came to us with a serious mien, and shook his head.

And there was Père Antoine, the most loved of any priest who ever came to New Orleans. Indeed, was not this the very *padre* whom a certain Governor Miro had put out of the city, whom the vicar general of the Bishop of Maryland suspended? Was not this the Padre Antonio de Sedella, who became, for all this treatment, the spiritual leader of our city?

So it was that this white-haired, white-bearded priest, with brown cassock and sandaled feet, and by his side a white-haired Baratarian with earrings and tattooed wrists and throat, stood each on one side of the bed of Louis de Bresse. And the household slaves stood in the doorway,

and M. le Docteur stood away as one whose part in the play was over. And on her knees beside the bed was Joan with dry eyes and pallid cheek.

" M. de Bresse, *mon fils,*" Père Antoine said when he had prayed, " I have heard the cause of this duel, and I know that God will be merciful to you. For it was not upon the field of murderous brawling that it pleased God to summon you into His keeping; but upon a field in glorious combat for the honor of your country. This shall all men know, *mon fils,* and your name shall be honored."

Then did he take the hand of Louis de Bresse and put it into the hand of Joan. " Here is your beloved child, M. de Bresse. And I praise God that you may look once more upon her sweet face."

So Louis de Bresse turned his face to her, and a smile came to his ashen lips.

And she said: " Gaffer, tell me your last wish, and whatsoever it is I will grant it, even though I go to the end of the world. But yes, even though I give up all happiness in this world from this day on."

He smiled, for her words had pleased him; but he shook his head, for he knew that his wish was too great for so frail a girl as this Joan to accomplish. And he said:

" Now that I am at the threshold of death, I would not desire that you give up one jot of your happiness, my sweet child. My wish is that you would always remain what you were—a lovely child."

But a cloud came over his face, and we who stood there knew that Louis de Bresse yearned in his soul with a terrific yearning to live and have his strength.

I doubt not but that I was the only one in that room who understood. For I have seen many men upon the threshold of death. Few had I seen dying as this man on a bed with a priest shriving his soul, but many had I seen upon decks that were awash with blood.

And as their strength ebbs away it is common for them to be inflamed with a great zeal—a zeal to perform heroic deeds. Thus it was with Louis de Bresse. He was old, and he had no strength except to turn his head and smile upon his lovely Joan. But at that moment he yearned with a fervor past all understanding to arise and bear arms.

Joan saw this torture upon his face and spoke again:

" Tell me, my darling gaffer, what is your last wish to Joan! Tell me, so I can bear this unthinkable sorrow."

So he told her, and we all heard and marveled at the noble wish which had gripped this dying man.

For he said:

" Would God that I could bear arms and defend my beloved city!"

Then Père Antoine and I and M. le Docteur looked at one another, and our hearts burned within us. For we three were old men, and we three likewise yearned for the strength of youth in order that we could be worthy of that greatest of all blessings—the strength to fight for one's country.

But the only one there with the strength of youth was none other than Joan—and she was a frail girl. But she said:

" Gaffer, I myself will do your work!"

De Bresse smiled again. " You are but a child. It is not for you to think of these things, *mignonne.* You must not come near to death. I will know you always as a child who had never touched death. I will not live to see you grown from a child, but think of you thus throughout all eternity."

But she said as with a great inspiration: " Gaffer, you have imparted your wish to my own heart. I will not take flight—as you and I planned together but a short while ago. I will stay, for now I love this city as you have loved it. Be at peace, gaffer, and know that your spirit will live in me."

Then as Louis de Bresse looked into the girl's face his waxen brows knitted as if he were looking into a great light.

" This business of war, my child, of burning a city, of pillaging, of blood—it is not for you, *ma petite enfant.* You are aloof—a goddess watching hapless mortals. What? You are not aloof? You are looking at me with a strange look. You understand these things, *mignonne!* An army will come to destroy your country. I see something in your face—a light."

" You have given up your life for the

honor of your country, *mon père!* Shall I forget that?"

Then did De Bresse cry to the Lord of Hosts:

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast ordained strength."

He sank back, and we thought that he would say no more. But even while Père Antoine's gentle voice arose and fell like a soft comber upon the sea beach, Louis de Bresse opened his eyes and looked at the girl kneeling by his bedside.

And we knew that he no longer recognized who she was. For indeed Joan had become in those few moments a woman touched with sorrow. And she was no longer a child.

Thus did the parchment on the dying man's face seem to turn to ashes—as if no more of the light of life glowed beneath it. But instead there seemed to be a reflection of light. Perchance it was the sun slanting athwart palm and magnolia in the *patio*. But it seemed to me that the light came from Joan's face and shone upon the parchment while the ashen lips spoke:

"Where is my son—whom I love?"

And, knowing that no man there could answer that question, I raised my voice and said:

"M. de Bresse, my friend, I will find your son."

Then did De Bresse say: "What strength of body I had, O Eternal, give to my son! Let him have the strength of seven men!"

Now I knew already that this was true. And I bethought me if I ever found his son I would tell him the words that his dying father had uttered.

But De Bresse said piteously:

"Is my son here?" And he looked at Joan as if with the hope that this lovely form by his bedside were his renegade son. Then did the kindly Père Antoine speak, saying:

"It is Joan at your bedside, *mon fils*."

And De Bresse fixed his blood-drained eyes upon her. And behold he seemed to be confused.

"Joan?" he said, mumbling the word as if in search of the meaning for which it was a symbol.

"Your Joan, gaffer," the girl replied.

"Ah, yes—my Joan!" And then his mind wandered. "Yes, even Joan of Arc come again after these many ages."

Whereat we all looked at one another, and I myself looked upon the face of Joan de Bresse as she knelt there with dry, courageous eyes and white cheeks. And I bethought me: this was not the Joan of a few hours ago; but indeed a maid who had heard the voice of God.

And from this reverie, into which we all —the *docteur*, Père Antoine, and myself— were plunged, we were awakened with the last words of Louis de Bresse:

"Put into her hands the sword."

And a certain very old slave hobbled to the mantelpiece and from thence brought a sword which the ancestors of De Bresse had borne against the English at Agincourt, and which, so it was said, a captain under Joan of Arc had borne at Orleans.

So the maid took this sword in her hands and held it to her breast; and the jewels of the haft made a cross against her breast, and the rays of the sun, slanting in, made the amethysts of the haft to burst into flame.

Then did Père Antoine and I and M. le Docteur understand that vision which had come to Louis de Bresse on his deathbed—even a vision of Joan of Arc kneeling at his bedside.

So Père Antoine invoked the blessing of God upon this holy scene. And the soul of Louis de Bresse was demanded of him, and he went to his reward.

CHAPTER IX.

INSPIRATION.

NOW some few days after this good man, Louis de Bresse, was laid away in the vault of his family in the St. Louis Cemetery, there came to pass a certain event of much import to myself as well as to all who lived in the shell islands of Barataria.

A proclamation was issued against us by Governor Claiborne, so that we were outlawed as pirates and a price was set on our heads.

It behooved me, therefore, to steal out of the city under cover of darkness, before I was apprehended and cast into prison, where many of my confreres were waiting to be hanged.

And so I went once more to bid good-by to my beloved Joan, knowing that I was a blot upon the spotless honor of that De Bresse house. And I knew that I should withdraw from the life of Joan de Bresse and no longer besmirch so lovely a thing by my presence.

So I went to Joan and, behold, I found that she was mourning the death of her beloved foster father. But she mourned not as an ordinary woman, but in a manner that is most strange to relate.

For in her long vigil of prayers she held before her—as a devotee might hold a cross—that jeweled Merovingian sword that had been bequeathed her.

Likewise her eyes—which I had thought would be red with weeping—were dry and illumined as with a strange fire. And I thought how, according to tradition, the eyes of Joan of Arc were uncommon large and pregnant with heroic visions.

Indeed when I went into her room this girl, plunged so deep in her sorrows, obsessed with what dreams I knew not, scarcely knew the old hermit from the swamps.

But when I said I would leave her and nevermore stain her life with my presence she turned as by magic into a little child again and her great eyes filled with tears.

"Do not go away, my poor, dear old man," she said sadly, "Never shall I forget that in my childhood you cared for me. Why, then, will you think these things?"

Now I knew full well that she would speak in just such a fashion; so I gave as my excuse something that she could not so easily refute:

"Governor Claiborne has proscribed against the men of Barataria. Therefore, to save myself, I must steal away under cover of the dark."

Now I saw the flame again in her eyes, and she began to fondle the sword which had been leaning against the *prieux dieu*. Indeed, it seemed to me that this sword was the symbol of all the De Bresse honor which was now her God. And she said:

"These Baratarians—so I have heard—are great fighters."

"It is true, my child," I said, wondering what thoughts were in her mind.

"But who are they?" she asked.

"They are the flotsam of shipwrecks, of pirate expeditions; yea, the flotsam and jetsam of life.

"And it is true—this that I have heard—that many of the pirates of the gulf have been driven to that haven by the British ships?"

"It is true," I said, still at a loss to know of what she was thinking. "Pirate crews who have lost their ships, deserters from merchantmen, smugglers, and men who have been outlawed from New Orleans—"

I paused because then I knew that she was thinking of Louis de Bresse's son, who might have been any one of these sorts of men I had mentioned.

"And all brave fighters," she was saying as she rubbed her white hand along the flashing steel of the sword. "Then, why cannot we use them to defend New Orleans?"

"They have no leader," I said. "For they are a hodgepodge of many races, many tongues, living on this shell island and that, on lonely bayou or in cypress swamp. How can such a people have a leader?"

"But if they had!" she exclaimed, pressing the De Bresse sword to her bosom. "Or if they only knew the glory that awaits all heroes who fight for their country!"

Now I was a stupid old man, and how could I understand the thoughts of a young girl? When I looked at her I thought I saw a Creole belle who dreamed of conquering all hearts at a ball, of waltzing forever to pleasant strains of spinet and violin; whose mind was a catalogue of empire gowns and beehive bonnets and Spanish lace and fans and geegaws.

And so I looked—an indulgent and worshipful old man—at this beauty. But as I looked all the light of the room seemed to be concentrated upon that sword and a glow emanated from the amethysts and garnets of the heft and shone upon Joan's face.

All else was dark—such was the intensity of my stare. And, behold, I saw no longer a Creole belle, but instead the Joan of Arc of our France come back in spirit to that fragile and exquisite body!

And I know now—what I did not know then—that Joan was afire with a great dream. She was communing with God, beseeching Him that she might find Louis de Bresse's son in the flotsam of life in those Baratarian swamps. And not only that, but her vision was greater still: to gather the warriors from the pirate crews of Barataria to fight in defense of their country!

"It is well," she said to me as though she had heard a voice speaking to her. "Go back to your shell island, dear old man, and there wait with all the other heroes of the sea—until the hour appointed by the Lord God!"

So wondering at this change that had come over her—I kissed her hands humbly, as first I had done when Louis de Bresse suffered me to see her.

And so I came away.

CHAPTER X.

A MIGHTY MAN.

THUS I shaped my course to where the pirates disposed of their goods and the smugglers sold their contraband slaves. And after many days' wandering in the depths of desolation I came upon one of the remote *chênières* of Barataria Bay, where it pleased God to make me a witness of a most wondrous scene.

This *chênière* is called Isle Ste. Ursule, and it has since been washed away—reefs, tules, cypresses, orange groves and all—by a hurricane, so that now it is little more than a mud lump haunted by wild geese. Here I beached my pirogue among the shells and went in among the cypresses, when I saw the most fearsome pirate crew that had ever been mustered by the devil himself.

Seven of them, who were quadroons or mongrel Frenchmen, were grouped about a chest in which, like smoldering fire, were many pieces of eight, ingots from Panama mines, jewels from Mexican hacienda or Central American cathedral.

Now, upon seeing me, they sent several of their number to take me and slay me. But, first, one asked me who I was that dared set foot on that isle. So I told them that I was erstwhile called Pierre the Drowner, but that I was now Pierre the Hermit, who kept the image of the Madonna of the Hurricane.

Upon hearing this they laughed uproariously with joy at meeting with a man whose repute as a murderer had spread over many seas. And likewise there were among them many superstitious men who had indeed heard of the miraculous powers of Our Lady of the Hurricane, and desired even then to make pilgrimage to her and give her thanks for the blessings that had come upon them in this last expedition.

So the leader—a man with bull neck and giant paunch—summoned me into the inner circle of this hideous crew, and said:

"If you are no other than Pierre the Drowner, you are welcome, for you are indeed of the blood. And if you are now Pierre the Hermit, it behooves you to make a prayer for the souls of the many men we have murdered on this voyage."

So I prayed—not only for the souls of those whom these wolves of the sea had sent into eternity, but I prayed likewise for these pirates themselves, who were—as their leader had said—of my kith. Nor did a man among them laugh in scorn at my words, but when I lifted my voice against the rolling surf and the wind crooning in the cypress and oak, all of that crew kept silence before God.

All, I should say, save one man, who was a young giant with shoulders that gleamed as if molded in burnished copper.

So I said: "Who is this man that laughs when I invoke the spirit of God upon this company?"

And a certain seaman said to me: "He is not properly of our number. But he was a drunken boatswain upon the first ship which we boarded. And inasmuch as he fought with such ferocity our skipper spared his life, on condition that from thenceforth he would fight our fights. And he consented."

Then I looked at the man—who was still laughing as a bad boy will laugh to scorn some godly priest. And I saw that his eyes

were of a keen sea color, as though they had in them all the strength, the cruelty, the beauty of the sea itself.

And so whilst the pirates returned to the division of their gold, I took one old seaman apart and asked further: "Who is this youth if he is not of your number? For he is a comely young rascal if ever there lived one."

And the old seaman said: "He is a Bourbon exile, kinsman to Louis XVI even he who was beheaded when this youth was born. And so we named him the Bastard Bourbon, but the man who called him this to his face, even the mate, is now floating in the bottom broth of the Gulf—with his carcass in one tide and his head in another.

"For this youth swung a cutlass at him with such force as though all the hatred of the guillotine which had beheaded many of his royal kinsmen were in that stroke. So now instead of calling him the Bastard Bourbon we call him Bourbon the Butcher."

Now as this royal murderer stood slightly apart from the rest of the crew, his great arms folded across his hairy chest, his torso nude and glistening in the light of the fire; his lips curled in a smile, as if the dross in that sea-chest were no more than a pile of bones over which these dogs were fighting, my heart went out to him in great admiration.

For I bethought me, he had been forced to join them—as a captive fighting to save his own life. And they had made him raise his cutlass against many an innocent soul. But I knew that if there were a just God in Heaven, this youth would not be called to account as others, or even such as I myself.

So I went to him and said:

"*Monsieur*, why did you laugh when I invoked the blessing of God upon this company?"

And he said: "First, because there is no God to hear you, and second, because this is a business of thievery and murder—and to mix prayers therewith is even like mixing oil with rum."

So he left me and joined the group about the chest. Then did I sit upon a cypress stump and wait for the skipper's leave to depart again. But he took no more notice of me. And instead he said to his men:

"The loot is justly apportioned among you, and now you are free to go where you will, except that in three days we sail again for the Gulf. For look you, the British ships of war are gathered together at Negril Bay, and when they set sail for the Mississippi to capture New Orleans, we will go to whatsoever port we desire without fear."

So a quadroon whose back was so bent and arms so long that the knuckles touched the ground, like the knuckles of a gorilla, lifted his voice and said:

"To-night I shall, by the grace of God, become drunk, so give me my share of the gold."

Then said another—whose hairy chest was writhing with tattooed snakes: "To-night I shall go to Algeria for a woman, and take her to New Orleans where we shall dance. So give me my share likewise."

"As for me," said another man with bald head, gold earrings, and a white beard: "I shall go to the Cathedral St. Louis and burn a candle for the soul of each man I have slain."

Then did the handsome youth, Bourbon the Butcher, laugh aloud; but the rest of the crew accounted this avowal the best of all, and each gave the old pirate a gold panama wherewith to buy candles. For they were all men who dreaded to see the bodies of those whom they had slain and cast into the deep, floating back—as all carcasses will—toward home shores.

Then spake the skipper himself with stained teeth and grizzly beard, and huge sweating belly:

"I will have a feast of brandied fruits, filet gumbo, muscadines and one duck for each man I have slain. I will eat until I am sick and then having disgorged myself as the young pelican disgorges when the fish hawk knocks him on the head—I will eat a meal of pomegranates, anchovies, almonds and cheese!"

So he apportioned the loot, giving each man a few pesos—but keeping the bulk of the treasure for himself. And there was much grumbling.

Then, considering myself one of their number—as I did with all pirate crews who landed on the Barataria shell islands—I looked at the young captive who was like a

Greek god standing aloof from these filthy mortals, and who had not been given so much as a castellano for the great fighting he had done. And I said:

"What will Bourbon the Butcher do?"

And the young man said, so that all could hear him:

"You have all given voice to your desires: the one to become drunk, the other to gorge himself, the other to search for a woman in Algeria, another to pray in the St. Louis Cathedral. Now I, too, have my desire; but it is this: I have tasted human blood in this expedition. And you have forced me to become a pirate and a slayer of men.

"Now, whereas in my boyhood and early youth my greatest desire was to become drunk, I have found a sport which is far more glorious—to shed the blood of a fellow man. I have only had a taste of the fighting. I shall do. Therefore, I proclaim my desire: I wish to fight more!"

Then one of the crew made bold enough to say: "Much good it will do you, for you will get not a centavo for your pains!"

But the skipper lifted up his voice in laughter and pronounced the young man's wish the best wish of all.

And being not only a glutton and a killer, but a man of some jest, the skipper said:

"If that is your wish, you shall have a fight even here and now!" So he sent for three of the brawniest black slaves whom they had abducted from San Domingo.

And he said to them: "Would you rather be slaves and work in the plantations till you are broken men, or would you prefer to be *gens libre de couleur?*"

And the three black beasts, having this translated to them, said they wished to be free men.

So the skipper said: "Then lick this young boatswain in hand-to-hand combat—and if you kill him I will free you."

Now the pirates gathered around in an open space where the shells were hard packed. And the youth, stripping himself, stood revealed like Apollo with sloping shoulders and narrow hips, and muscles tanned and finely molded as if in bronze.

Never did I marvel so at the beauty of manhood, as I did then.

And while the three blacks leaped upon him—like apes and beasts of the jungle, this man fought agilely—not like a beast but like a man who was half god.

Now one of the blacks leaped upon his back encircling him with ebony arm; and another gave him such a blow at the base of the skull that he staggered forward, and a third, as if only a generation removed from a jungle brute—a smaller negro with a huge jaw, leaped for his throat and buried his teeth there even as a beast of prey bringing down a stag.

But this man the youth took and held him above his head and hurled him as if he were a sack of corn against a cypress stump where he lay with shoulder broken. And another did he fell with one blow that split his chin, so that he lay as if dead. And the third in like manner was felled even at the very moment he lifted a large stone with which he would have dashed out the white man's brains.

And when in the space of a few moments this combat was brought to a close and the three savages lay bleeding upon the shells, the pirate crew raised up their voices in a huzzah. But seeing the youth standing there—every muscle aquiver now and glistening with sweat so the sun made what was like bronze, shine gloriously like gold—they backed away. For the sight of him was fearsome to behold. And they thought—as the truth was—that their heroic captive was amuck.

And the skipper—as if to placate him, said: "It is enough. You yourself are free. Go your way, and God or the devil be with you—whichever you choose!"

And the youth said: "I care for neither God nor devil. Nor do I care to be free of this crew. I wish to fight more, and I see no other whom I would like so to fight as you yourself!"

Whereat the crew mumbled with fear that this captive of theirs should challenge their own skipper. But remembering that they had all been cheated in the apportionment of the loot, they mumbled with a peculiar sound, as if to urge the youth on.

And the skipper was afraid, and said, still in a placating voice: "Why do you wish to fight me? If you think you deserve a

part of this loot for the fighting you did on board my brig, well and good! I will give you a share."

But the youth said: "I care nothing for these pieces-of-eight. My lust is not to hoard gold, but to fight men."

"But why do you choose me?" the skipper demanded, reaching for the pistol that was tucked in his belt.

And the youth said: "For no other reason but that I dislike the cut of your beard."

Then there was a snicker of laughter among the crew, and the skipper, fearing for his life, drew his pistol, but as he fired, the youth struck his arm with a blow that in speed and grace was miraculous to behold. And then the two men closed in mortal combat.

But it was like a young puma springing to the throat of a bull. For the skipper was fat, and although a giant in strength, he fell to his knees with the youth's hands clutched deeply in his throat.

Then it was that the skipper drew a dagger from his bosom and lifted it even to plunge it into his adversary's heart, but as his hand was raised, his eyes bulged and glazed over, and his tongue peeped from between his stained lips, like head of turtle peeping out of mottled shell. And behold! his hand stiffened and the dagger fell to the sand where it lay gleaming.

Then the crew lifted up their voices and urged the youth to slay this murderous and unjust brigand.

And the skipper gurgled piteously that his life be spared.

But the youth said, as the huzzahs of the crew rang in his ears:

"Would not any lawful judge command that a noose be put about your throat as I have put my hands?"

"Spare me my life, O fiercest of youthful fighters!" the skipper cried. "And whatsoever wish you voice, I will fulfill!"

"Your ship and your crew are mine!" the youth cried. "And you yourself from this day on are no pirate skipper—but an oysterman!"

"It is well!" the chief gasped as though it were his last breath of life.

And thus the youth released his grip about his victim's throat and the skipper panted hysterically as his lungs filled with life-giving air.

Then presently the mountain of flesh crawled off like a wounded porpoise toward a swamp and his crew never again called him a man.

And when this liberation had been accomplished, the mariners lifted up their voices in a joyous shout and waved their woolen caps, and drew their cutlasses and twirled them flashing in the sun.

So this young Bourbon said to them: "This hoard which the skipper apportioned to himself is mine, unless there be any among you who will fight me for it."

But no man would come forth to claim another centavo of the loot.

So the Bourbon said:

"Inasmuch as you grant the gold is mine, I will do with it what I please. I will divide it in equal parts so that each man among you—on condition that he enter my service—be given a part!"

Then did they wave their cutlasses again and there was great rejoicing. For already this noble young fugitive had endeared himself to them by his glorious deeds. And they said they would have him for their skipper and follow him to the ends of the sea.

And he took the skipper's dagger and made every man put his hand upon it and swear. And one man took me by the sleeve and drew me into the midst of them and said: "Let this old Pierre the Hermit, sometime the greatest of murderers, invoke the blessing of God upon this oath."

But the Bourbon said: "How can you invoke the blessing of something that does not exist? And furthermore, there'll be no more praying while I am the head of this crew. From now on it is blood and gold, but damned if you'll mix any prayers with it!"

So they were satisfied and each man fell greedily to the share apportioned to him.

But I, Pierre the Drowner, went to the new chieftain and looked up into his face which was beautiful even though stained with sweat and blood.

And I said:

"Are you indeed a Bourbon—kinsman to

the King of France, who at your birth was beheaded?"

Then he looked at me startled. And a doubt seemed to come to his eyes. And he said fiercely: "Do you question that?"

And with a courage that had come from a God-sent inspiration, I made bold to answer:

"I do! For the Lord God has opened my eyes and I see that which before I did not see. You are of noble French blood, but the lineaments I see clearly living in your face are not of the Bourbon blood, but of a noble Creole of New Orleans."

Then did I see a look come over his face as though he had turned ashen with anger. But I went on fearlessly, with the inspiration of God still giving me courage:

"I see the lineaments of your father—a noble man and my friend." So I told him to his face, softly but without a tremor in my aged voice:

"*You are the son of that noble Creole, Louis de Bresse!*"

Then did the youth lift that dagger which he had of the dead skipper—a dagger which had drunk of many men's blood, and he made as if to thrust it into my breast, but I knew that a youth of his ilk could not so foully slay a white-haired man, and I stood before him and, behold, his hand came down and he bowed his head.

Then I bethought me that a great shame had come upon him for being thus discovered—he the son of so honorable a man—on the very moment that he had made himself the leader of the vilest crew that had ever anchored in Barataria.

But I gripped his hands in mine, and whispered:

"*Monsieur*, I will tell no man who you are. I will still call you the Bourbon, for you are every inch a king!"

CHAPTER XI.

AS IN DAYS OF YORE.

"*HOWL, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down: all they that bear silver are cut off!*"

Behold how the English fleet under that same Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane who had laughed the Americans to scorn and landed his men but a few months before in Chesapeake Bay and wrought great havoc among the coastwise towns—behold him setting sail for New Orleans.

Sail on with Admiral Malcolm and General Keane and Colonel Brooks! The mansions and the Creole girls of New Orleans are yours—for who is there to protect them? Come on, Sir Thomas Hardy—you in whose arms Lord Nelson died at Trafalgar! Come on, you warriors in scarlet who humbled my mighty confrère, Marshal Soult!

Devils, I give you your due. You won great victories at Badajos, Cuidad Rodrigo and San Sebastian. How simple for you to ravage my beloved New Orleans!

Thus it was one day I said to an old oysterman who had beached his lugger at sunset:

"The Creole belles of New Orleans are famous throughout the world, and these Englishmen have on their lips the watchword, 'Booty and Beauty!' So they will find a way! And here we are digging for oysters instead of bearing arms in the defense of our country!"

Then the old oysterman replied, saying:

"Have you not heard, St. Pierre, that one of these beautiful Creole girls you speak of came down into these bayous to muster an army of Baratarian fighters?"

I stood agape, and then clutching the man, I burst out:

"What! What! A beautiful Creole girl—in the swamps—mustering an army! What is this you are saying?"

"Do not rend me to pieces, O St. Pierre! For I have had no hand in this thing. It is only what I have heard."

"You have not seen her?" I cried.

He answered quickly: "Not I, but she has been seen at this *chênière* and that, on reef and lonely bayou. And with her is an old slave bearing a sword with amethysts and garnets twinkling at the hilt!"

And I cried out as in a frenzy. "It is she! It is she! Give thanks to the Lord for this wondrous thing! Praise the Lord from whom all blessings flow!"

But the old oysterman broke into my cries, saying:

"It is a miracle, St. Pierre. And all the fisher folk and pirates about the far *chêniéres* have heard that this Creole girl was the spirit of a beautiful woman who was once cast upon these shores. For this lass is built in her image—"

And I cried: "It is the daughter of that woman—even she who was cast ashore on the wreck of my own brig! How well I know! But where is she now? Quick with your answer, for my heart burns within me. I must find her and take her again in my arms!"

But he begged for patience, saying, further: "This is only what I have heard, St. Pierre. And you must know that many legends spring up in these scattered islands, and among these fisher folk and pirates who are all superstitious men. And many of them—unlike you—are ignorant. And albeit they never lie to others, they will often lie each man to himself, in which case one will give tongue to the wildest of forecastle yarns."

"Even so, I believe!" I cried. And as I turned to my pirogue, bent on searching the seaward marshes for news of her, the oysterman plucked me by the sleeve, saying:

"I have not told you, St. Pierre, the most wondrous part of this legend." And he went on: "Whereas some believe this beautiful vision is a spirit raised from the sea; and others that she is an incarnation of that image on Isle St. Crôme—I mean even the wooden image of Our Lady of the Hurricane—I believe that she is—as she herself says—a reincarnation of Joan of Arc!"

And I cried out with a great wonder. For I recalled how her foster father had on his deathbed seen a vision of the Maid of Orleans!

So I said:

"It is even she! A reincarnation of the Maid! And she heard the voice of God speaking to her—there at the deathbed of her foster father! It is Joan of Arc herself come back to save her beloved French countrymen as she saved them centuries ago!"

So I leaped into my pirogue and when the oysterman had told me where the girl was last seen, I stood off from shore. Twilight was upon me. But I set my course for Isle Ste. Hyacinthe. And my paddle churned up gleaming lights of phosphorescence, such was the eager fury of my stroke.

CHAPTER XII.

DISSENSION.

WHEN Joan of Arc pleaded with Baudricourt to send her to the Dauphin Charles, her voice must have been as impassioned as the voice of Joan de Bresse when I saw her at Isle Ste. Hyacinthe!

It was now well past sun-up. But the sky was still red, the shell beaches gleamed with warm color, and the waves of the Gulf were tinged.

All the fishermen and planters of Ste. Hyacinthe and the outlaws, who were in hiding, were gathered upon the beach before Joan. And such a group the eye of man has never seen! Frenchmen and Spaniards, Cubans, Islingues, mulattoes—they were there! With fichus as bright as crimson flowers against their swarthy skin. One carries a musket, another a shrimp-seine! One watches cynically, puffing at his pipe; another kneels as if this were a goddess come from Heaven!

And so she was! The early light was radiant upon her face. Her eyes were like the eyes of Joan of Arc—which history says were large and strange, beaming with the fire of her inspiration. Yea, my Joan's eyes glittered as wondrously as the jewels upon the sword she held in her hand!

All Ste. Hyacinthe was silent before her. All save the breakers crooning upon the gulfward shore; the cry of a sea bird passing over her head in its flight to the far horizon. And there was one sound else: the voice of the girl exhorting this rabble to take arms and follow her to New Orleans! And now she cried to them—every man who would fight—to put forth his hand and touch that sword she held, even the sword which had been dipped in the blood of the English in the Hundred Years' War. And as the men went up toward the shell mound where she stood, and pirate and mulatto, fisherman and planter gathered about her and thrust out brawny tattooed

hands, I came running through reefgrass and leaping across cypress stumps. And thus the girl, casting her eyes in my direction, saw me and recognized her old Pierre.

Then did she turn all of a sudden from this warlike Joan of Arc to a little child. Yea—the little child that once had played upon these beaches with the gulls! And she dropped her sword then and there and flew across the shell beach and cast herself with a joyous cry into my arms. And the men—her soldiers—turned and said to one another:

"It is Pierre the Drowner—or rather St. Pierre, who is a man of God and who for many years has guarded Our Lady of the Hurricane!"

So they understood and waited, watching, I suppose, with mingled reverence and joy and wonder.

Thus Joan embraced me and kissed me and laughed and wept. Then did I turn to the crowd of fishermen and outlaws and say:

"Truly this girl is ordained by the Lord God to go upon this mission; to gather together such of us as are outcasts, such as are called redbones, such as are greatest among fighters! Truly she has heard the voice of God. And I myself, called erstwhile Pierre the Drowner, do hereby pledge to fight in defense of our country."

So the girl picked her sword up from the shells, and I kissed it. And there were great huzzahs, because Pierre the Drowner was far famed for his prowess as a fighter, albeit he was now an old man. And the huzzahs were so great that the sea breeze rang with those hearty voices and the gulls screeched. And then the girl lifted up her hand, and when they kept silence before her she said:

"Get your guns and your cutlasses, even those with which you have fought on the high seas, and be in readiness. And although they have refused your aid and ignored the offers of Lafitte, I prophesy that when the English come, and when they see New Orleans like a sheep before a wolf pack, they will enlist every man who can carry a gun or sword—be he pirate or fisherman, white or black, free man or slave!"

And this prophecy that Joan made upon that shell beach as Isle Ste. Hyacinthe came true, as every man knows. But no sooner had Joan made this speech to the men who had pledged themselves to her sword than an untoward circumstance came to pass.

I had noticed that among the group of fishermen and freebooters on Isle Ste. Hyacinthe there were diverse members of that pirate crew of which young Thomas de Bresse had become captain. And these men, as is well known, were the greatest of the Baratarian fighters.

Now, while Joan de Bresse held her sword up for all these men at Ste. Hyacinthe to swear by, behold, a boatswain from the ship of Thomas de Bresse beached his gig on the bayou side of the island and approached our company.

And he said: "Our new skipper, the young and murderous Bourbon, has ordered the crew aboard; for this noon we set sail for the Spanish Main."

And those of the crew who had sworn to fight for Joan's sword banded together and grumbled. But they were afraid, for the boatswain was a giant man, who was called John Hawk, and he wore a red fichu about his forehead, and earrings, and a great cutlass at his belt.

Then Joan, seeing that this man had come to take away part of her band, said: "Who is this murderous Bourbon who is mustering a crew from among my own fighters?"

And the boatswain, John Hawk, said: "He is a young fighter than whom I have never seen one more skillful in battle or more terrible in anger. And he has been elected by our own will as chieftain. And I am his boatswain, and proud of it, so help me God."

Then said Joan: "Which of you men are followers of this Bourbon?"

Half a dozen of the brawniest who had pledged allegiance to her lifted their hands. So she said:

"Will you go pirating again, or will you come with me and fight for your own country?"

Then said the spokesman of the crew: "We have no country, for we are sailing under letters of marque from Carthagena,

But most of us are Louisianians, and we desire to save New Orleans. Therefore it is our pledge to follow you, and to forsake this Bourbon murderer."

Then said John Hawk, the boatswain, with many oaths:

"Can you dare to mutiny against a man like this Bourbon the Butcher? When I tell him your answer he will come and slay you all by his own hand."

"It is not mutiny," said one of Bourbon's crew, "for we are not on the high seas. Let him muster a crew elsewhere."

And the boatswain shouted with an oath: "He will have no other crew. I know him. He is resolved to set sail to-day, and he will bring you aboard, dead or alive, you may rest assured. And when he hears that you have forsaken him because of the wiles of some woman, he will run amuck in his anger—as he did on that day when he humbled our former skipper. Well do I know how he hates all womenkind, as any true skipper will when his men forsake the sea to follow after them."

And so he left, saying that they had best hide themselves in the nethermost reaches of the bayous and swamps, if they valued their lives.

Then when I turned to the girl and saw that she, too, feared for the sake of these men who had forsaken all to follow her sword, I was about to tell her that this Bourbon was no other than the renegade son of her foster father De Bresse; but remembering my oath not to divulge his identity, I held my peace.

So I said to her: "It is best that you come with me to Isle St. Crôme, and bide your time till this Bourbon sets sail with whatsoever crew he can impress into his service. For I know well that he is a dangerous man and one that must not be crossed."

So Joan said to the men who had gathered about her:

"The English navy is even now on the Gulf shaping its course for the Mississippi, to destroy us. Until they come, remain in hiding, and when first we sight their sail band together at Isle St. Crôme ready to bear arms for this glorious cause."

And thus the pirates and fishermen disbanded. And I took Joan and her slave with me in a pirogue, and we shaped our course for Isle St. Crôme where many years ago Joan had played on the reefs with the wild birds.

CHAPTER XIII.

REFORMATION.

NOW after we had spent several days upon the long, low *chênière* of shell beach and oaks which is called Isle St. Crôme we heard rumors of what had happened to the proposed expedition of young Thomas de Bresse.

First we heard that his brig had not stood out for the Gulf—as he had proposed on that day when we were at Isle Ste. Hyacinthe. For—as it was rumored—his men had forsaken him and pledged themselves to follow the sword of a young Creole belle who had come down to Barataria from New Orleans. Then did we hear how he had come upon three of his men at a tavern on one of the islands, and had driven them all at the point of his muzzle aboard his brig and cast them in irons.

But all others who had been of his crew remained in hiding, awaiting the arrival of the English from Negril Bay—which was to signalize their gathering together. And Thomas de Bresse could find no trace of them.

Then was he wroth at being thwarted, and by no other than a young Creole belle from New Orleans. And he went about trying to recruit a pirate crew from this island or that; but at every point he found that all the great fighters among them had already sworn to follow the sword of this strange visitor whom they thought to be a reincarnation of Joan of Arc.

And, as I heard from various fishermen who beached their boats at Isle St. Crôme, this young Thomas de Bresse, finding himself thwarted upon the threshold of his first piratic adventure, swore that he would find this Creole belle and call her to account.

But I gave thanks to God that he had been prevented from going to sea, for I considered how he had until now been a captive of a pirate crew, and not a pirate

himself. Hence—although he had fought murderously—he had been impressed into the service of pirates. So I thought what an act of Providence it was that Joan had come to Barataria in time to save this glorious youth from setting sail for the Gulf and thus damning himself forever.

But mark you what happened:

On a certain evening Joan came back to the mud-clinkered cabin where she had lived as a child; and her servant cooked us a supper of corn meal and bacon and tropical fruits. And after we had eaten we went to the shrine of Our Lady of the Hurricane —and there, with our hearts stirred with the anticipation of coming events, we watched the red sky over Bayou La Fourche and then the fall of darkness.

And thus did we return to the cabin, and Joan slept in the room where, many years before, her illfated mother had slept. Fearing through instinct that some harm might come upon her, though I could not imagine what, I slept in the room which was between hers and the door of the cabin.

Now in the dead of night I awoke. I knew not at that moment what it was that had awakened me, but by some prescience, given me by the grace of God, I lay there with eyes open and with heart standing still. Then, as if to brush away the mosquitoes, whereof there were many on that island, I lifted my hand and, behold, I touched cold iron which was not a hand's breadth from my temple.

Then came a voice from the darkness: "Do not move or speak, old man, or you will die."

Then I recognized the voice and knew that the cold iron which my hand had touched was the muzzle of a pistol held by that villainous boatswain I had seen some days before.

I was about to ask why he stood guard over me, a poor old hermit who had no more enemies in the world, save only the enemies of my country, when I heard a dolorous cry from the next room wherein was my precious Joan.

Then I leaped up and cried out in fury as though to tear my lungs. That mongrel boatswain struck me on the forehead with the butt of his pistol, and I saw sharp flashes of light and then a denser darkness than had ever enveloped mortal being. Now as I lay helpless, gasping, with my mouth filling with salt blood, I heard a scuffling sound, and the door opened, admitting a ray of moon.

And, behold, the boatswain ran out, and following close upon him was a stalwart man carrying something in his arms. I tried to cry out again, but could only gurgle, and I tried to rise to my feet, but could only fall from my bed and tumble to my knees.

Slowly as my strength came back I arose and rushed into Joan's room and called to her, and found her bed empty. But instead, as my hand groped for her, it fell upon the jeweled sword which her foster father had given her.

With this in my hand I rushed out in pursuit, through the moss-hung oak, through the orange groves, out upon the shell beach; but I was too late. The two men who had come as brigands in the night to abduct Joan from my house were already in a gig, and their oars churned up the phosphorescence as they stood off for deep water.

Then did I raise my voice and summon all the fishermen and pirates who had gathered together on Isle St. Crôme; and when they heard me they came running to the beach, and I cried:

"Get your swords and your pistols, and man your boats; for Joan, who was ordained by God to lead us—the sainted Joan of Isle St. Crôme—has been abducted by two hellish mongrels!"

But before they knew what the purport of my cry was I myself leaped into my pirogue and shoved off. I was thus a gunshot from shore, following in the wake of that gig and its precious prize, before the men of St. Crôme had fully awakened and taken to their boats.

Now the gig outdistanced me with ease, for its rowers were powerful men, and was I not but an old man already spent with much fatigue and fear? But I followed hard enough upon them to see that they were making for a brig lying at anchor at the mouth of Bayou Muscadine eastward of Isle St. Crôme.

I knew then that this was the brig of Thomas de Bresse, who called himself Bourbon the Butcher. And I thought: "He does not know that the girl he abducts is the foster daughter of his own father; nor does she know that this is the Thomas de Bresse which her foster father disowned when he adopted her."

And my brain was awhirl with wild thoughts as I paddled.

But it was a long time before I reached the brig. And by now many of the men I had summoned to help were paddling their pirogues or rowing their skiffs toward me, and the bayou glittering under the moonlight was dotted for a mile with the pursuing craft.

Thus it was that I was the first to reach the brig; nor did I wait for others to follow, but instead took Joan's sword, which was my only weapon, and ran up the Jacob's ladder at the brig's prow and leaped over the rail.

The girl had already been taken below by that desperado, Thomas de Bresse, but his boatswain was on deck, and when he saw me he rushed upon me, swinging a cutlass.

And I swung the sword, which was a heavy and murderous weapon. But being old and spent with my paddling, I had my blow warded off by the boatswain. And for a moment we engaged in a fierce combat so that our weapons struck sparks and rang lustily.

Then did Thomas de Bresse, hearing this bruit, come above, and as he drew his pistol —most certainly with the intent of shooting me down—he saw something that gave him pause.

I knew not what it was that had thus stayed his hand, but now as I write apart from the heat and tumult of that affray, I can well imagine what strange emotions must have possessed the soul of Thomas de Bresse. For at that moment he saw the Merovingian sword—the weapon of his ancestors—with jewels twinkling softly in the moonlight, with sparks bursting from the steel, with blade flashing in strange brilliancy in the moonlight.

Now what could this young desperado have thought when he saw that noble sword? Indeed, it was a weapon which he had worshiped during his boyhood with an infinite reverence. It was a symbol of the honor of his house. It was an ornament of great beauty which any boy, dreaming of knights and glorious combat, would worship as savage might worship an idol, or as devotee might worship a cross.

It was thus that young Thomas de Bresse threw himself between us as I fell exhausted on the deck. And as the savage boatswain lifted his cutlass to slay me De Bresse stayed his hand and, turning to me, said: "Whence had you that sword, old man?"

"It belonged to her, even this woman you have but now abducted from Isle St. Crôme.

"How came she by it? For, as I well know, this is the sword of Louis de Bresse, and he would never have let it out of his keeping save only death itself demanded it of him."

"Death has demanded it of him," I replied.

Then Thomas de Bresse started back with a cry and said:

"What is it you are saying, old man? Is not Louis de Bresse still living?"

And I said:

"Alas, my noble young man, Louis de Bresse died but a few weeks ago. And this girl who is come into the marsh country as Joan of Arc to raise an army of fighters is no other than the adopted daughter of that noble man."

Then did Thomas de Bresse press the sword to his heart and bow his head, and for the space of a few moments he said no word; and I knew that he was crushed with sorrow.

Then presently he put out his hand toward me and lifted me from the deck where I had fallen. And still holding me by the arm, he turned to the boatswain with whom I had fought, and he said to him:

"Go below and unlock the brig where I have imprisoned the three of our crew whom I pressed into service. Tell them to go wherever they will, for I shall not stand out for the Gulf, even though I muster a crew of forty men; nor shall I ever be skipper of this pirate brig from this time on."

So when the boatswain obeyed and went aft, Thomas de Bresse led me by the arm and we went below to Joan.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WHITE SCAPEGOAT.

NOW when we came to the captain's cabin, where the lantern on board was shedding its light, we found Joan sitting upon the bunk, her face as white as snow, and her eyes, which had so long been illumined with the glory of her mission, now dilated with fright. And so dazed was she that she did not at first recognize me—thinking, no doubt, that I was but another one of this murderous crew. But I went to her, and she arose and fell swooning into my arms.

Then did the son of Louis de Bresse pour a glass of wine and I held it to the girl's lips, and she smiled—and it pleased God to give me the infinite joy of comforting her. But when she saw that this murderous young renegade was still in the room she clung to me the closer, and I said:

"Be brave, for he is not the murderer you think him."

So young De Bresse, tossing off a good tot of rum from another jug, threw himself into a chair, spreading out his legs with a thump of boots on the deck, and folded his arms across his chest.

Then did he look at the maid in puzzlement; and his brow clouded, for he bethought him what he could do now with such a prisoner.

And the girl looked bravely into his eyes, and, having her hand in mine, took courage and answered the questions he put to her. First he asked:

"Do you know what sword this is which this old man brought aboard my brig?"

And she said: "It is the sword given to me by my foster father, Louis de Bresse—a sword which the De Bresse men have wielded in the defense of France ever since the Hundred Years' War."

"And for what reason, *mademoiselle,* did that elegant Creole gentleman give so famous a sword into the hands of a little slip of a girl like you?"

"To wield it in the defense of my country," she replied.

"A very peculiar heritage, *mademoiselle,*" said Thomas de Bresse. "This Creole gentleman must have loved you dearly to bequeath so priceless a possession to one who was not even of his own blood."

"I was his nearest of kin—though not of his blood," she explained.

"That is not the truth, *mademoiselle,*" he replied. "I have heard from the mariners in Barataria hereabouts that M. Louis de Bresse had a son."

Her eyes burst into flame. I felt the soft hand which had been so cold with fear draw away from mine and reach to young De Bresse.

"You have heard!" she exclaimed. "Then where is he? His father told me on his deathbed to find the youth."

"So, his father thought of the renegade after these many years?"

"Tell me what news you have of him," the girl cried. "If I can only find him in time—before the English come! I pray to the Lord God that this blessing may be granted!"

"What blessing?" the other asked curtly.

"That I may give young Thomas de Bresse the sword of his noble father so that he may raise it in the defense of his country."

Then I saw that the eyes of young De Bresse had caught fire likewise, even though he hid the trembling of his lips with a sardonic smile.

"*Mademoiselle,*" he said finally, "I will help you find this renegade and disinherited son."

She emitted a cry, a prayer, and I thought she would have fallen to her knees before him in thanks. But I held her up, and she still stood there, while her captor sat looking up at her like a schoolmaster catechising a child.

"But before I tell you where you may find him," he said, "I wish to understand the motive which prompted this Creole gentleman—this honorable man—to send you in quest of a renegade who had brought so much dishonor upon him."

The girl seemed to have had this answer

upon her lips, as if for all the years she had lived in the De Bresse house she had been brought up with the words written in her heart:

"Because I believe my foster father loved this renegade son whom he disinherited."

Now when Thomas de Bresse heard these words I knew that he was greatly moved, and I looked away for fear that I might see tears come into his eyes—and that he would be angry at being thus watched by an old pirate while in the throes of so great an emotion.

So I looked instead at the girl's face—and behold! as she stared at the youth her eyes filled with tears. And it was as if I saw a light upon her face that was reflected from his. Then I could not help turning to Thomas de Bresse.

No tears misted those keen, sea-colored eyes, but the smile was gone from his mouth and he bit his lip.

Presently he said in a very low voice:

"No, *mademoiselle,* that cannot be. Louis de Bresse did not love his son. He cast him away—as perhaps you have cast away your dolls. And why? I have heard that Thomas de Bresse when a boy was given to drunkenness and street brawling. I have heard likewise that he was a duellist. But what of that? Would not Louis de Bresse himself fight a duel when his honor was at stake?

"Oh, yes, I know something of the youth. He fought, not so much for his honor as for the love of duelling. And he always slew his adversaries. Nor would he apply himself to the business his father set him to—which was in a merchant house of New Orleans, but was forever dreaming of the sea. Were these reasons enough to disinherit a youth?"

"Louis de Bresse was proud," the girl said, as if pleading the cause of the old man she had so loved. "And I know right well—that he loved the boy—as we all loved him. The slaves loved him—for he was a handsome youth—but a harsh one if they angered him. Indeed, one big slave who was a bully on the plantations, incurred the boy's wrath and still bears the mark of the beating he received. But even he loved the memory of the disinherited son."

"Even he?" Thomas de Bresse said fervently, his eyes glowing and his face alight with a grin.

"Yes," the girl went on. "All of them loved him—though it was forbidden them to speak his name. Even I who had never seen him, knew him as one who had been lured away by the call of the sea—which was always in my own blood. And for that reason I pictured him as a hero—yes, as my own hero.

"And I dreamed dreams of him, and prayed for his soul which they said was given to the devils. And, furthermore, I named one of my dolls Thomas the Pirate—pretending that it was he. Nor did I ever cast him aside as you think I might have when I became a debutante at Mardi Gras. Instead I have cherished that pirate doll above all things else of my childhood."

She looked beseechingly to the face of Thomas de Bresse, and said: "Now, *monsieur,* will you help me find him?"

But he turned away his face, as if he had been looking at a too bright light, and frowned. Then he said in a suppressed voice:

"What will you do, *mademoiselle,* when you find this blackguard?"

"I will give him his father's sword. But first I will throw my arms about his neck and kiss him, and call him my beloved kinsman. And inasmuch as I am the mistress of the De Bresse house, I will tell him that all of that inheritance which was taken away from him is his now to have and to hold."

Then I saw Thomas de Bresse arise from his seat and turn his back as if with the desire to pace the cabin deck. But the space was small and he was a stalwart youth, whereat I thought of a caged lion. So I backed away from the door as though to let him pass and go up the companionway to the free air.

But instead he turned once more to the girl, looking at her with a soft yearning in his wondrous eyes.

And I believe that it was then that the girl recognized him.

But at that moment there was a clamor

on the decks—as though the ship were boarded with attacking pirates. And there was shouting and a great din of voices.

And, lo, a man came running down the companionway ladder—no other man than the boatswain, John Hawk, with jaws drenched in blood. He cried in desperation:

"All the men of Isle St. Crôme are boarding us, master. Fishermen and free-booters—and even those of our own crew are turned against us! For they are in search of this woman. And surely your life is not worth a tinker's damn, sir, against their fury!"

And we heard the shouts of those on deck:

"Go below! He's taken her below—the murderous dog! The hell-hound! He has abducted the saint of Isle St. Crôme!"

And there was then a great scuffling of boots upon the deck, and a clanging of cutlasses. And the wounded boatswain, whimpering with fear at so great an assault, fell to his hands and knees and crawled forward toward the darkness of the forecastle. And immediately after this we heard the attackers scrambling down the companion ladder.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

INDEED, we are living in wonderful days!
A touch of a button—the house is ablaze;
We can turn on the juice to a washing machine,
And, without any labor, our clothes come out clean.
With a sweeper the same, 'tis no longer a bore
To clean up the ceiling, the walls, and the floor.
Though miles lie between us, while sitting alone,
We can have a nice chat with our friends, on the phone;
The adjusting of keys on a dial, and then
The radio brings to us words of great men;
A trustworthy pilot is found, and we fly
On a voyage of pleasure, at will, in the sky;
We race through the streets in our automobiles,
We put coins in a slot and—presto! our meals!
A twist of the wrist and we've water, heat, gas;
Oh, great are the wonders that have come to pass.
Some change since the days when but dim candle lights
Were all that illumined the houses o' nights;
And slow-moving ox-teams, the principal mode
Of locomotion upon every road.
They brought water from springs, a long distance away,
And they rubbed and they scrubbed in the old-fashioned way.
Then, none of these wonderful time-saving schemes
Had even existed in man's wildest dreams.
Yet, with all of this magic at our command,
There's one thing that I cannot understand.
'Tis this: when our grandfathers happen to meet,
They shake hands with each other, drop into a seat
And half of the forenoon, perchance, spend in praise
Of what they're bound to speak of as "those good old days."

Ida M. Thomas.

A Good Throwin' Arm

By JAMES W. EGAN

THE pronounced brunette porter, whisk broom in hand, came up the aisle to announce Cougar Pass was the next stop. Charley Barr folded his copy of a baseball paper, thrust it in his pocket, and reached under the Pullman seat for a well-worn bag.

"Brush y'all off?" queried the white-jacket.

"Needn't broom me much, George," remarked the passenger. "Comin' into this jerk with a suit pressed prob'ly's enough to queer me, off the bat!"

George, whose name chanced to be Alexander, chuckled.

"Yessuh! Guess y'all don't think much uv this yere Cougar Pass town. Ain't never seen nothin' uv of it 'cept from the car steps, but 'at's been plenty for this yere boy. Yessuh!"

"And I'm doomed to spend to-night and Sunday in the slab! Well, that's what comes of bein' an ivory grabber, George! It's a great life, Gawd knows it ain't!"

"What did y'all say 'bout ivory?" The porter's brow wrinkled.

"Come on, George, be yourself! You read the sport pages, I know! When I say ivory I ain't referrin' to them gallopin' twins you prob'ly carry along with a rabbit's trilby in your hip-pocket. I mean—"

"Yessuh!" broke in the George who was Alexander, "I knows now what y'all mean. Guess y'all's a baseball man. Ain't no good ball players in this yere Cougar Pass town, is 'ere?"

"George," returned his passenger, with some bitterness, "in this burg there's a young catcher who'll make Ray Schalk, Muddy Ruel and Johnny Bassler look like members of the Applesauce, Alabama, team, in the Class Z league. You may not be-

lieve it. Neither do I, but I'm sentenced to a week-end in this hesitation mark to make doubly sure of it."

"Y'all must be travelin' for some sho' nuff big league team—huh?" Admiring awe crept into the tone of the whisk broom wielder.

"Oh, yeh!" was the answer. "I smoke 'em out for the Agates, and Mike Delehanty's lads have been called big leaguers. In April, if not September."

The train wheels screeched to an erratic stop. Barr just missed banging his head against the icewater cooler.

"Yere y'all are!" The white-jacket picked up the bag.

"Exhibit A—Cougar Pass!" grunted Charley Barr, a moment or two later. The dun-colored station stood almost alone. Against the background of low hills, possibly half a mile away, he could distinguish the clustered buildings of the town.

"Goin' uptown, mister?" hailed a sallow, slouch-hatted individual at the wheel of a car not entirely unknown in Detroit. "Take yuh tuh a hotel!"

"Ah, the bus service!" Barr stepped forward. "Haulin' for any particular house, brother? Or is there more'n one in this place?"

"Yep; we gotta coupla reg'lar hotels," replied the bus service. "For four bits I'll drive yuh tuh either the Commercial House or the Empire."

"Where have I heard them names before!" muttered the Agates' ivory investigator. "Which one is best, brother?"

"Reckon mebbe the Commercial House 'ud sut me."

"All right," Charley Barr rejoined, maliciously. "Just drive me to the other place!"

"Reckon it ain't no skin off my hips!" sourly commented the bus service. "Cash in advance, mister!"

The Empire Hotel proved a three-story wooden structure on the main thoroughfare. The lobby was fairly large and looked as if it had been swept at least once during the past week.

"What kinda room yuh want?" drawled the stoop-shouldered clerk as the newcomer registered.

"Well, bein' as this is Saturday night, how about one with a bathtub?" said Barr.

"Got any nice, fancy, dude rooms like that?"

"Stranger," declared the man behind the desk, "there ain't a more modern hotel than the Empire in Montana! For four bucks a night I can give yuh a room a Congressman slept in last month."

"Go ahead then and dust off the key to it!" voiced Barr. "I don't s'pose after a month I'll catch anythin'; besides, I'm a pretty tough citizen, anyhow. By the way, do you happen to know a gent in this burg named Al Brown?"

"Sure! That is, if yuh mean the Al Brown who runs the hardware store and helps back our ball club."

"Check! He's the guy!"

The clerk whirled round the register.

"Yuh must be the man from the Agates, come tuh look over Rusty Peters, our catcher! Al's been expectin' yuh, Mr. Barr!"

"And everybody else, it seems." Barr scowled. "I'll bet the only biscuit in Cougar Pass who won't know what I'm in town for is old Pop Corn, ninety years old and deaf as a post since Slingin' Bull batted him behind the listeners at the battle of Dirty Collar in '76!"

"Well, it ain't very often a big league scout shows up in these sticks," smiled the clerk. "Rusty Peters is some catcher, Mr. Barr. He's got some arm! Cougar Pass plays the Sandvale Stars tuh-morrow, and it'll be some game! I get the afternoon off, tuh!"

"Uh-uh!" commented Mr. Barr. "Where's Brown's place of business—his hardware emporium?"

"The store is half a block down this street. He keeps open until eight o'clock on Saturday nights, gen'rally."

"Eight o'clock? And it's only six now. Before droppin' in on Brother Brown I may as well slice up a sirloin and p'raps write a letter to the old lady. Where's a good place to shake out a napkin?"

An hour later the ivory hunter, fed and finishing up a fat cigar, was reading over the short letter he had scribbled to his wife

in Pennsylvania. He smiled grimly at what he had written:

DEAR MA:

Just pulled into this woolly jerk late this P.M., and figured I'd drop you a line or two. Had a rotten trip coming up from Denver, and I know I ain't going to draw no throbs from week-ending in a slab like this. Everything seems about as exciting as Sunday morning in Augusta, Georgia.

I'm here to up and up a young backstopping phenom named Peters, claimed to be a world beater. Yeh, they always are. Mike Delehanty would have me look him over. Seems a guy named Al Brown, who runs the hardware store, used to steal cherries with our beloved manager when they was kids or something, and he's been bulling Mike plenty about his star receiver. Chances are Brother Brown knows as much about real ball tossing as I do of the price of hinges, but nothing would satisfy Mike but I rattle in here to see this kid work. I expect to pull out Sunday night, leaving Brown sadder, if not wiser.

Well, be a good girl and don't forget to feed the cow and milk the chickens. I go to Seattle from here to once-over Red Killifer's athletes, so will write you from there next.

Your loving

CHARLEY.

Sealing and stamping the missive, Barr threw his cigar stump out the window into the night and made his way to the lobby. The clerk hailed him before he reached the desk.

"Oh, Mr. Barr! Al Brown's here! This is yuhr man, Al!"

A rather undersized, sandy-haired fellow, his clothes baggy and rumpled, jumped up from a cane chair and came forward with eager hand.

"You're Charley Barr, of the Agates?"

"That's a good strike," replied the scout. "Pleased to meet you, Brown. Old friend of Mike's, I understand."

"Yes, Mike and me read Buffalo Bill weeklies in the same schoolroom," Al Brown grinned feebly. "I ain't seen him for nearly twenty years, but I always follow the Agates every season. We got a real ball player here in young Jud Peters, Mr. Barr. He has a mighty good throwin' arm. I reckon the Agates could use another catchin' prospect, couldn't they?"

"We ain't exactly crippled when it comes to maskmen, Brown. Still, a major league club ain't no more anxious to pass up a promisin' kid than a press agent is a front page yarn. Smoke?" Barr produced a cigar case.

"Not a great deal, Mr. Barr. I don't think I'd better—"

"Go ahead; I didn't buy 'em in Cougar Pass!" wickedly remarked the visitor.

"Well, thanks!" Brown accepted a weed. "Sure looks like a real smoke! I've closed up my place so s'pose we walk down to the Nonpareil Pool Parlors and meet Jake Fisher, our manager. Most of the players hang out there, and Rusty—that's what we gen'rally call Peters—may come around if he ain't too busy. I guess you'd like to meet him."

Charley Barr frowned slightly.

"Most places I go I try not to get advertised in advance. But it appears everybody in town is wise to me now, and I s'pose Peters knows all about me. What's he work at? Anythin'?"

"He's the town's deputy marshal. That's why I say he may be busy. Rusty is a good official, too. He can shoot as straight as he throws, and sometimes bein' quick on the trigger ain't no handicap."

"You don't mean to tell me there's still gun play in these parts?" protested the scout.

Al Brown nodded.

"Now and then, 'specially on a Saturday night, a few hombres get lickered up and raise hell. Rusty can handle 'em, though. Duke Bridges, the marshal, has been laid up for two weeks with a bum leg and the boy has been keepin' order right along."

The Nonpareil was a long, one-story building. Inside were a number of pool and card tables, and a soft drink bar of considerable length.

"Want a little shot of somethin', Mr. Barr? All I have to do is give Jake the wink."

"No, thank you. I stopped herdin' green elephants and pink monkeys a few years back. Touch nothin' stronger than coffee now."

The resort was crowded, noisy and somewhat hazy with smoke. A glance around convinced Charley Barr a goodly portion of those present had given Jake or

somebody else " the wink." At the farther end of the long room a wide-shouldered six-footer seemed to be creating some sort of disturbance.

" Reckon Buck Meade is on a tear," remarked Brown. " He's a bad actor when hooched. They say he usta be a gunman, but he's gen'rally peaceable enough until the white mule starts kickin' him. Let's go over and howdy Jake Fisher."

The poolroom owner and pilot of the Cougar Pass club shook hands cordially with the scout.

" Yuh ain't gonna be wastin' time watchin' Rusty Peters do his stuff tuh-morrow, Mr. Barr," Fisher asserted. " He's on his way here now. I don't like the playfulness of Buck Meade. He may get ugly, and he packs artillery. So I called up Rusty. He can take care of the Buck Meades. Uh, Al?"

" Yuh bet he can, Jake!" agreed the hardware man.

" That tall hombre shootin' pool across there is Slim Layne, our leadin' chucker," went on the manager. " Got good speed, but no hook to speak of. He's playin' with Sam Lanham, the third sacker, and Sam is —hey, cut out the rough stuff, Buck!"

Fisher strode rapidly toward the troublesome six-footer, who had just dumped over a table.

" Seems I'm right in time, Al," a new voice broke in.

Charley Barr turned with Brown. He saw the well-knit figure of a young man not much over twenty-one. His bronzed features were topped by hair of reddish-brown hue. A star was pinned to his flannel shirt.

" Hello, Rusty!" greeted the hardware merchant. " Yeh, Buck's hooched again and full of hell. But meet Mr. Barr, of the American League Agates, Rusty. He'll be lookin' yuh over to-morrow."

" How d'yuh do, Mr. Barr," acknowledged Rusty Peters, with almost curt brevity. " P'raps yuh and Al better move outa range. Buck don't like me, and he's a hard hombre when tanked. I hope Jake hasn't been sellin' him his booze!"

The deputy marshal started briskly in the direction of the drunken man and Fisher.

" Rusty's sure all business!" admired Al Brown. " When he's playin' ball he plays ball every minute, and when he has a duty to do he goes and does it. He's cool, too, and got a head on him. Reckon we better do what he says, and move."

"Huh!" grunted Charley Barr. However, he followed at the other's behest.

A sudden roar escaped the belligerent Buck Meade. He had just caught sight of the advancing Peters.

" Damn yuh, Rusty!" he shouted, " don't yuh go tuh mixin' up with me! I'll plug yuh sure's hell's hot!"

Two or three men near the big fellow scattered. Meade's hand plunged toward his belt.

But even as his fingers lapped around the pistol butt, a sharp report resounded through the pool hall. With a single deft movement Rusty Peters had drawn and fired. Evidently he had aimed carefully, for all his quickness. The back of the big fellow's right hand had merely been grazed. Meade shook the member, cursing.

" Next time yuh try that some fingers'll be missin', Buck!" warned the deputy marshal. " Elevate them mitts! Jake, yuh better take his gun and hand it tuh me. Thanks! Now, Buck, yuh're goin' down tuh the jail and rest until this rotgut is outa yuhr system."

" Yuh wait! I ain't done with yuh!" growled Meade, in thick but threatening tones. " Yuh're brave enough here, with all yuhr friends standin' by, ain't yuh? Some day I'll get yuh alone, and mebbe things'll look different!"

" Shut up, and start steppin'! Yuh know I ain't afraid of yuh at any time or place. Come along!" Rusty prodded a revolver into the big man's back. " Jake, you ain't been sellin' this hombre dynamite, have yuh? I've told yuh—"

" Not a drop! Honest, Rusty! He was loaded when he came here. He got no booze in this place!" Fisher expostulated.

" Well, he got it somewhere, that's a cinch! Pick 'em up and lay 'em down, Buck!"

As the young man marched his sullen prisoner out of the Nonpareil, Al Brown grinned up at Charley Barr.

"See Rusty beat Buck to that draw, Mr. Barr? Pretty snappy! The kid can throw bullets as well as baseballs."

Jake Fisher rejoined them.

"Believe me, the boy moves right in!" he averred. "Plays no favorites, neither. Hear him ride me about Buck's hooch—and me his manager! I reckon I ain't givin' Meade no licker! Rusty handles a gun nice, don't he? Give yuh a thrill, Mr. Barr? At times the West is still West!"

"So it would appear," dryly observed the visitor. His thoughts might have surprised the pair:

"Give me a thrill, huh? P'raps this little melodrama was put on for my benefit and that big stew was the goat. They figured they could show me what a cool, nervy young hero Peters is—dazzle the ignorant, marvelin' Easterner with some hokum gun play. Oh, yeh! This guy Meade was right. Fat chance he had with all Peters's gang around! Very likely it would be different if he had Rusty all to himself!"

With every passing minute Charley Barr grew more sour toward Cougar Pass. He was inclined to dislike the young catcher; he resented what he considered the efforts of Rusty Peters's admirers to place the youth in a highly favorable light.

"As a ball player he prob'ly is a great deputy marshal!" inwardly growled the scout. "And if he's the false alarm I figure, Mike Delehanty sure draws a scorchin' wire to-morrow evenin'!"

The remaining moments he spent in the pool hall bored him, although he tried to hide the fact. Slim Layne, Sam Lanham and other Cougar Pass diamond celebrities were introduced. He listened to much discussion of the morrow's game with the visitors from Sandvale, Idaho. Apparently the home club was wildly anxious to win, but none too confident of the outcome.

"Just another bush ball game!" was the scout's weary reflection. "And yet they chatter as if the Senators was meetin' the Giants in October."

Rusty Peters did not reappear at the Nonpareil during Barr's stay. As soon as he could the visitor pleaded fatigue from train travel and retired to the room a Congressman had once slept in.

Arising very late Sunday morning, the ivory hunter dawdled in the Empire lobby after breakfast, reading the Butte papers. He found it hard work to kill time until the hour of the game between the Cougar Pass Cats and the Sandvale Stars. Finally Al Brown took him to a lunch he didn't particularly need, and he was driven out to the ball grounds.

The unfenced diamond nestled in the shadow of the hills. Back of home plate a rough wooden stand provided seats for several hundred spectators. This was filled long before the contest. Brown and his companion found the only seats available on the extreme right, half-way down the first base line. These were in the open, the wire screen not extending so far.

"Mebbe yuh'd like somethin' better than this, Mr. Barr?" worried the hardware merchant.

"Oh, no; I'll see all I want to see from here," answered the Agate representative.

Al Brown took his seat with some misgiving. For the last hour or so he had realized the visiting scout was lacking sadly in enthusiasm; relation of the sterling virtues of Rusty Peters had left him cold and unmoved. Stubbornly the little, sandy-haired man fought against the conviction Barr wasn't even mildly excited over Cougar Pass's young catcher.

"Oughta be a great game this afternoon," he observed, rather unhappily. "Sandvale has cleaned up all around Idaho, and we've done pretty good ourselves. They say Sandvale has a classy left-handed pitcher."

"Uh-uh!" grunted the other, lighting a cigar.

The rival teams ran through short practice periods. The home club displayed a trifle more snap. It may have been because Backstop Peters kept his infield on the jump; he seemed to shoot the ball to all the bases with speed and accuracy. Charley Barr conceded mentally he had a pretty peg.

By the time the umpire—a brawny chap imported from Butte—dusted off the plate the crowd had doubled. Spectators flowed along the first and third base foul lines.

Neither side scored the first two innings. Slim Layne's fast ball had the Idahoans

swinging late, while Sandvale's southpaw heaver, showing a fair curve and control, yielded no hits.

The visiting nine broke into action at the start of the third chapter. The first batter doubled over third base, and romped across with a tally on another rousing thump to right for a brace of bags. Annoyed, Slim Layne passed the Idaho pitcher.

"Tighten up, Slim!" yelled Al Brown, nervously. "We gotta get out of this hole!"

The Cougar Pass hurler threw wide of the plate. Rusty Peters took the pitch and whipped the sphere beautifully to second base. The runner, who had been enjoying a long lead, paid dearly. He was out by a yard.

Cougar Pass fans shouted their approval. Peters drew cheers and the unfortunate Sandvale Star a derisive chorus.

"Lookit that peg!" howled the hardware merchant. "Guess Rusty ain't no smart catcher, uh?"

"Good play," admitted Charley Barr. "May pull the pitcher out of it."

Layne's troubles, however, weren't over. A bunt placed the other base runner on second. A hard single to center scored another run.

"Two out, Slim! Pitch ball!" yodled Brown.

Plainly peeved, Layne flung the horsehide viciously in direction of the plate. It hit the dirt and Peters managed to block it only by a quick movement.

The runner on first set sail for the keystone cushion. Retrieving the ball, the Cougar Pass receiver made a hurried, hard throw. Yet his aim was good enough to flag the would-be thief by a margin of inches.

"Three out! Oh, you Rusty!" barked the hardware man, leaping to his feet. "Who says that boy can't throw?"

"Nice recovery," said Charley Barr. "Of course, the bird who went down ain't no Archdeacon or Frisch. A fast man would have made it—but Peters handled the ball well."

"Rusty's always in the game, Mr. Barr." Brown sat down a shade less blithely.

Cougar Pass failed to dent the two-run lead in the last of the third. Evidently steadied by a rest period, Layne got through the fourth in fine shape. Not a man reached first.

"Come on, hombres! Git some runs!" entreated a tanned cow chaperon.

Not until the last of the fifth, however, did the Sandvale portsider relent. Then Sam Lanham singled, and the next batter walked. An easy fly out, and Rusty Peters stooped for a stick.

His initial time at bat, the red-haired catcher had grounded out. Now, after missing a fast curve, he worked the pitcher for two balls.

The Sandvale southpaw tried to cut the outside corner with a swift shoot. Rusty Peters stepped into the ball, bringing his bat around with a well-timed swing. A solid crack, and the ball soared far into the outfield, dropping beyond the sprinting left and center gardeners.

"All the way round, Rusty!" shrieked Jake Fisher, coaching. "She's good for four bags!"

The manager was right. The backstop circled the bases, beating the relay to the plate without trouble. He had driven in two runs ahead of him, the count standing now 3 to 2 in favor of the local nine.

That home run caused the demonstration among Cougar Pass fans such powerful pokes under similar conditions always will cause wherever baseball is played. Al Brown whooped himself hoarse, and he had plenty of company. Charley Barr smiled a trifle cynically. He had witnessed scores of circuit swats in the majors, not a few of which had been hammered out by a certain Mr. Ruth.

"Wasn't that a wallop?" Al Brown at length turned to the ivory trapper. "And just when we needed them runs! I guess mebbe the Agates can't use a ball player like that!"

"Yeh, he hit one; it was a sock!" Barr nodded. "He stands up there and cuts at that olive!"

One run to the good, Cougar Pass athletes took the field in the sixth full of snap and paprika. Everybody was chattering, confident. Sandvale hitters were retired in order.

The visiting left-hander hadn't given up, however. He had forced two batters to ground out after Peters's four-bagger in the fifth, and he proceeded to whitewash the home team in the sixth.

The seventh and eighth stanzas passed without change in the score. Slim Layne was touched up for a couple of hits, but fear of Rusty Peters's arm chained runners to the hassocks. The young man was playing nice ball, and he had hit a sharp single on his third trip to the plate.

Charley Barr had to confess to himself the red-haired youth looked good. After all, the Agate representative was a keen judge of diamond talent and knew better than to let personal feeling sway him.

"I s'pose young Peters is playin' his hand off to-day on my account," he ventured to remark to Brown at the end of the eighth. "Doin' better than usual, prob'ly."

"No, I can't say that," earnestly responded the hardware merchant. "Rusty always gives his best, whatever he's doin'. He appreciates yuh lookin' him over, but the fact is he's kinda sore at me for takin' so much trouble on his account, he says. He reckons he don't deserve no more special favors than the other players. Foolish way to look at it—still, that's Rusty!"

"Huh!" said Barr. "P'raps after a season or two in the minors — well, you know, naturally, there's a world of difference between bush ball like this and the big league article."

"Why, I can't figure how yuh'd want ta see a better game anywhere than this to-day, Mr. Barr," Brown defended. "I think it's been a darn good battle!"

"Yeh—for the comp'ny it's played in!" admitted the scout. "But what's all the sudden excitement down there?"

The first Sandvale sticker to bat in the ninth had whiffed. As another had grimly advanced to the rubber, a boy of fourteen had burst through the crowd, breathless. He was panting out something to catcher Peters.

"That's Carl Thornburg's kid!" exclaimed the hardware man. "Carl is a sorta deputy, on duty around the jail Sundays with Rusty away. Somethin' must have happened! I'll find out!"

It was only a minute or two before Brown returned, his expression troubled.

"If yuh'll excuse me, Mr. Barr," he said, "I'll leave yuh awhile. I'm goin' to get Rusty's gun. Yuh see, Buck Meade has busted jail. Got Thornburg to come near him by yellin' he was sick, and then laid him out and grabbed his six-shooter. He's comin' this way, young Carl says. That hooch is still poisonin' his mind, I reckon. The minute the game ends Rusty is goin' to start roundin' him up, for there's no tellin' what Buck'll do when the hooch is workin' in him."

Charley Barr frowned after the vanishing little man.

"More hokum—or can it be the real thing?" he pondered. He glanced at the diamond where Slim Layne was preparing to pitch.

The heave was wide. Rusty Peters caught the ball only by a quick lunge. As he did so, there was a commotion near third base. A big man with a revolver appeared. Bystanders scattered away in wild confusion.

Buck Meade, liquor-crazed jailbreaker, pulled trigger. Hardly able to believe it, Charley Barr heard the report, saw the spurt of dirt fly up near the home plate.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "Why don't Peters run?"

But the backstop of the Cougar Pass nine had no such intention. The last ball thrown to him was yet in his right hand. Quickly steadying, he shot the sphere directly at Meade.

The hastily aimed pellet hit in front of the big fellow and caused the second bullet from his revolver to go wild. Very wild, indeed; Charley Barr distinctly heard it whine above his head.

"My God!" escaped the horrified scout. "This is real! The big egg means murder!"

In an illuminating flash came to him the injustice he had done Rusty Peters the night before. Jake Fisher was right! The West could still be West, on occasion!

Terrified persons were scrambling out of range. Of all those present, only one seemed to remain cool. And this was the man whose life Buck Meade craved.

The moment Rusty Peters had seen his quick throw lodge at the feet of the foe, he had turned to the badly scared umpire and snatched several extra baseballs from that official's pockets. As if he were pegging merely to a base, the catcher prepared to trust his life to his strong right arm.

Possibly no stranger duel ever was waged in the State of Montana—hard leather spheres opposed to deadly pistol bullets. Charley Barr stood amazed.

Buck Meade's third shot rang out. It couldn't have missed the red-haired receiver by more than inches; nevertheless, Rusty took deliberate aim and threw, in rapid succession, two baseballs.

Both of these hit their target. The first bounced off a shoulder; the other caught Buck Meade with cruel force in the region of his belt line. He doubled up in agony. Hard leather had won out over hot lead!

Charley Barr sat down, mopping his perspiring face. He saw half a dozen men, now brave, pile on the groaning desperado, and knew the danger was past. But the thrill of it all stayed with him. He wouldn't forget this ball game for months to come!

The excited crowd finally had calmed, the game had been resumed, and two Sandvale players were out before Al Brown returned to the scout's side.

"Phew!" he exclaimed. "I always knew Rusty had a good throwin' arm, but I didn't know how darn good it was till just now. Yet the boy says when it was all over he shook like a leaf. Says he was plumb scared for a while. Didn't act that way!"

"Bein' human, he prob'ly was scared a bit," gravely observed Barr. "Scared—but not licked!"

"What do yuh think of our backstop by now, anyway?" queried Mike Delehanty's old friend. "All things considered, he oughta be a pretty fair prospect."

"Well," came the studied response, "he ain't bad behind the bat, he stands up nice at the plate, and he has a fine arm. But p'raps you'd be surprised how many youngsters in this country has all them qualifications. I've seen a coupla dozen last month or so, and I ain't advised the Agates to grab a single one!"

"Yuh mean yuh don't want Rusty, Mr. Barr? Not even to take him and send him out for seasonin' some place?" Brown's face fell.

Abruptly the ivory hunter chuckled.

"Brown," he remarked, "twenty-four hours ago I didn't figure you could make me grab him on a bet. But try to keep him from now! I want Peters and not to send him out for seasonin', either! He has somethin' far more valuable than a nice battin' eye or a good throwin' arm. He has the faculty of bein' able to think mighty quick in a tight place. More than that, he has the good old guts to carry things out. It's brain and nerve that really makes a big leaguer, Brown! Well, there's the third out. Come on, I want to talk dotted lines to that young red-headed deputy marshal of yours. Smoke one on me?"

And Charley Barr tendered the case of cigars which had not been bought in Cougar Pass.

THE END

THE 196TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

THE SNOW PATROL

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

Author of "The Avenging Shepherd," "Out of the Silent North," etc.

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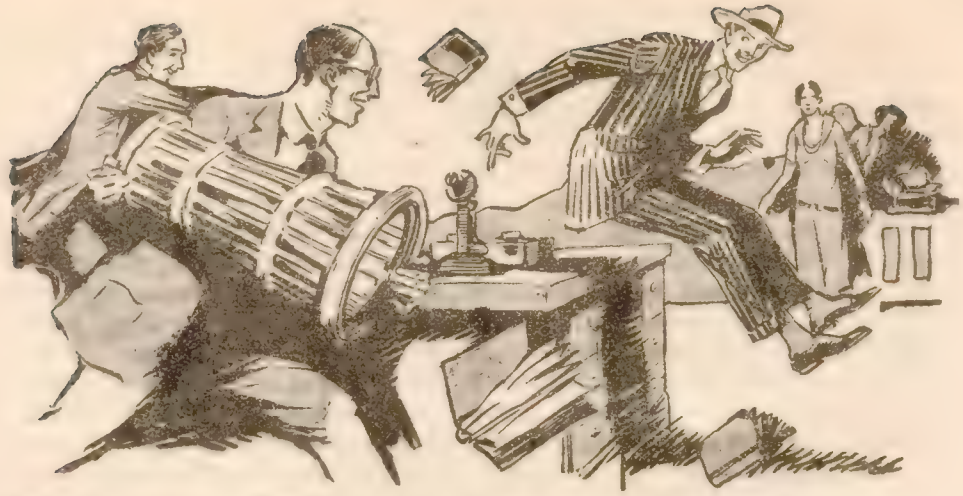

Tom, Dick and Harry

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Unbeatable Bates," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

TOM BROCKLEY, salesman for the hardware firm of Rufus F. Saxton & Son, finds his efforts unappreciated and resigns, subsequently opening a similar business with Dick Cadman and Harry Norcott as partners. Tom's salesmanship, Dick's efficiency and Harry's politeness seem to assure success, although their friendship is strained with the trials of the new business and the friction of three distinctly different types of minds trying to direct one firm. However, they sail through preliminary difficulties, and Tom, the breezy member, takes his associates to call at the home of Elsie Telfer, daughter of the former mayor. Tom is devoted to Elsie, who returns his interest. Elsie's father is inclined to give the new businessmen advice on tricks to secure municipal contracts. Harry learns that certain palms would have to be greased to get profitable building material contracts and his stanch honesty rebels against any such course. To Tom's chagrin the powerful Telfer is antagonized at the very outset by the attitude of Harry, who begins to look like a liability to the new firm.

CHAPTER V (*Continued*).

ETHICS OF YESTERYEAR.

TOM BROCKLEY was fidgeting and trying vainly to catch Harry's eye. "I can assure you, Mr. Telfer," he said at last with a conciliating smile, "that Mr. Norcott means no offense. He has old-fashioned ideas, and no one has taken the trouble to knock them out of him yet; but he'll learn, all in good time. We shall go after that contract, I promise you, sir, and we shan't let our competitors put anything over on us if we can help it."

"That's the way to talk, Tom," said Telfer cheerily, "and I believe you."

"We're going to take our place in the line-up," declared Dick Cadman, feeling called upon to say something, "and we're going to offer the public quality, service, and efficiency. Whatever we find it necessary to do, according to the 'accepted methods of business,' as you said, Mr. Telfer, we shall do for the sake of *service*, and of *efficiency*."

"You've summed up the whole thing in a nutshell, Mr. Cadman!" Telfer exclaimed admiringly.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 19.

"But he has not summed up the policy that we shall follow while I am in the firm," said Harry Norcott belligerently. "The aspiring statesman turns his head away and allows his henchmen to buy enough votes to carry him into office, *for the sake of service and efficiency*, I believe. We are not going to do it! But if this thing is coming to a show-down, we may go after that City Hospital contract, and we may get it, Mr. Telfer, without *seeing* the mayor and without compromising with crooks."

"I thought these men were calling on me," protested Elsie Telfer in sudden desperation. "If I can't stop this horribly serious talk any other way I'll simply have to turn on the radio."

"Anything, Elsie!" exclaimed Tom Brockley indignantly; "anything to keep my angelic partner over there from shooting off any more heroics!"

CHAPTER VI.

"AS ITHERS SEE US."

TOM BROCKLEY was still in the throes of a fine indignation when he reached home after calling with his partners on Elsie Telfer and her father, and he stalked into Dr. Brockley's study and told him how Martin Telfer, president of the City and Suburban Street Railway Company, had offered to put the new firm in the way of making the race for the City Hospital contract.

"If Harry Norcott was dead set on smashing the business in the quickest possible way," he said, "he couldn't go about it with any more downright cussedness. We're as good as on the toboggan now, and he's running alongside and greasing the skids."

Dr. Brockley was vaguely disturbed by the rapid recital, which he did not fully comprehend, but his sympathy went out to his distracted son.

"It seems a great pity," he said, putting down his book and spectacles. "It would be such a triumph for you to get a supply contract like that, and it might strengthen your personal relations with Martin Telfer. You seem to be on excellent terms with Elsie, to be sure, but Martin Telfer is a prominent and powerful man, and he could do a great deal for you if he were so disposed."

"It's all so unlooked-for!" cried Tom. "The idea! Harry Norcott setting himself up to tell us what's what! The only member of the firm without any experience, and without a grain of business sense—or common sense!"

"You must reason with him."

"Reason with a goat! A club is the only thing that would make an impression on a skull as thick as his."

"It would indeed be a great pity if you were to lose such a chance," mused the doctor, relighting a dead cigar and watching the smoke curl upward. "I don't push myself forward very much, you know, Tom, but I am interested in the new hospital, and I should like to have something to say about its policy when it is opened. I'm not sure that I'd care to be the resident superintendent, but I believe I'm qualified to be the head of the visiting staff. If you were on sufficiently intimate terms with Martin Telfer and Mayor Durfey, it's possible that I might be consulted. You know how such things work out in a city like this."

"Don't I?" Tom exclaimed. "I know how such things work out, and I'm in a fine way to miss everything that's coming, all on account of a pigheaded idealist who thinks he knows something about business."

"I think I'll see the mayor myself," Dr. Brockley decided suddenly. "I used to know Roscoe Durfey rather well, when we were both younger, and I'll tell him about the situation. I won't mention my own interest in the hospital, of course, but I'll tell him what it would mean to my son to get such a contract."

"Election will be coming on in a few months," said Tom shrewdly, "and you might ask him what you can do to help the city get a first-class mayor like him to accept a third term."

Over in the select Elm Street section of the city, Harry Norcott was pacing up and down the hearthrug in his august mother's study, where she sat by an open fire, sur-

rounded by impressive volumes of historical and political lore.

"These reports are very gratifying to me, Harry," she remarked, after listening to the story of his adventure with Martin Telfer. "You are so doubtful of yourself, my dear, in matters of business, yet I find you acting very creditably on all occasions. No compromise, my son! The Norcotts have never compromised with their inferiors for personal advantage.

"Mr. Telfer is a wealthy man—socially prominent, politically powerful, I believe—but otherwise a *nobody!* No background, no desirable antecedents! I do not even remember who or what his father was. He has worked hard and achieved a good deal in a material sense, by shrewdness and unscrupulous methods.

"The small amount of stock that I own in the City and Suburban Street Railway Company is of questionable value because that rascal has manipulated it to his own purposes for the last ten years, and it is waterlogged. You'll do well to have very little to do with the fellow, and I'm sorry that your friends, Tom and Dick, are so taken up with him. Elsie Telfer is a pretty little chit, but quite empty-headed—though I dare say poor Tom finds her adorable."

"Oh, of course, Tom and Dick are all right!" cried Harry suddenly, recalled to a loyal attitude toward his chums and partners.

"Are they?" demanded his mother sharply.

"We don't always agree," admitted the son, flushing before her direct scrutiny, "but we manage to discuss all important points until we arrive at something. It's a sign of good health in a business, I believe, when there's a conflict of opinions instead of a mere acceptance of everything that comes."

"Ah, how like your father!" sighed the doting mother. "He was always militant in the cause of right, but ever ready to defend his weaker fellows against criticism. What an example you furnish, dear boy, to those young men that are associated with you!"

In the Church Street house of the Cadman family Dick was not defending Harry against criticism.

"It does seem like a blasted shame!" groaned the unusually meek Samuel Cadman, after listening to his son's account of the call on the Telfers. "That's the kind o' luck I've always been up against, but I didn't think it would stick to my boy. Always just getting ready to grab off something good, and always having it yanked away from me!

"Why can't those fellers leave such things to you, with all your education and experience, Dick? The idea o' this young Norcott whippersnapper settin' up to be the judge of other folks' principles!"

"Oh, I'm going to read the riot act to him," Dick said convincingly. "I couldn't say much to-night; certainly not right there in Mr. Telfer's house. And I was too downright mad to say anything after we came out. Martin Telfer is one of the leading citizens of Harrowburg—president of a big corporation and a leader in politics. I wonder what he thought to have a kid like Harry Norcott telling him about business ethics?"

"Martin Telfer never did take much notice o' me," the father murmured plaintively, "and I've been a drudge round the City Hall for goin' on thirty years; but I suppose it's because I've never had a chance to attract attention.

"There I've been, day in and day out, in the tax office, the treasurer's office, the license bureau, and 'most every place in the building except the boiler room, and I never got anywhere yet. If you had a chance to get in on this City Hospital construction business, I guess it would make people think we were amounting to something, and even an old codger like me might get a look-in. If my son was making money, folks might begin to look me over too."

"It's that Jane Norcott that fills Harry's head with those crazy ideas, I reckon," said Dick's mother. "She's too high an' mighty for any use, and always was. She's got a little money, and she thinks the Norcotts are a little better than anybody else. Martin Telfer could 'a' bought an' sold her husband ten times over, any time in the last twenty years."

"It's no use talking," sighed Dick. "The mistake was made when Tom and I took Harry in with us. I don't know how it's all coming out, but we've got to make him listen to reason. His mother's money is in the business, but he seems to think we don't have to do any business; he's perfectly satisfied to stand around and talk about his high ideals."

Next morning, however, the young men had cooled off somewhat, and Tom and Dick seemed disposed to postpone the conference on the City Hospital contracts for a time. Harry was grimly prepared to defend his stand against all comers and went about the store during the forenoon with tight-shut lips and a defiantly tilted chin, but Dick was still busily reforming and reorganizing the office for service and efficiency, and Tom went out about ten o'clock in eager haste, like a hound who has caught the scent of some far-off, mysterious prey.

Harry spent most of his time back of the counters, with Eddie Roker, learning the stock and making it unnecessary to add another man to the sales force immediately; and young Roker was at first amused by the polished and gentlemanly bearing of his new employer, then whimsically interested in him as an unfamiliar specimen, and finally won over to a certain grudging admiration.

"Wha'd yer play me for—a sucker?" demanded a workman in overalls, slamming a handsaw upon the counter in front of Eddie Roker. "I didn't say I wanted a saw to cut cheese. That's made o' tin, that is. File it, an' ye'll file the teeth right off."

"Aw, why didn't you go to the five-and-ten first off?" demanded Eddie. "Pay a dollar and a quarter for a saw, an' then kick about it! You guys make me sick—always lookin' for something for nothing."

Harry interfered quietly.

"Did you tell him it was a good saw?" he inquired.

"I said it was good enough for the money."

"Is it?"

"Why, any boob would know what kind of a saw he was getting at that price!" protested the clerk.

"Cuttin' a piece o' butter with that saw would dull the teeth," asserted the customer.

"A saw that won't cut is not good enough at any price," said Harry. "Give him one of those spring-steel, hand-hammered saws."

"Those are two seventy-five in that size," said Eddie Roker; "a dollar and a half difference."

"I said give him one," corrected Harry. "There will be no difference in price. It appears that we misrepresented this saw to him, and we're not here to do that sort of thing. We don't intend to sell any inferior articles for practical use at any price, and the main thing is to have our customers satisfied."

"I'd say you was a real gent, if I was writin' home about it," gasped the man, gaping at Harry incredulously. "I reckon you're one of the new fellers that bought out this place, eh? Well, you'll get my trade, mister, if you keep on that way, an' no mistake."

"But not much profit," complained Eddie Roker, somewhat abashed, as the man departed with his new saw.

"A great dry goods merchant once declared that 'the customer is always right,'" Harry explained pleasantly. "That's the idea that we must work on in future. That man may never come again, but it's possible that we've made a good friend of him."

"I see the idea, all right," admitted Eddie ruefully, "but it's darned expensive, seems to me. Old man Page, when he was alive, wasn't much like that. He'd argue all day with a customer before he'd give back a red cent, and he wouldn't exchange any goods."

At noon Dick Cadman was still dictating very impressive business letters to Miss Hanby, and when Miss Lander went out to luncheon the stenographer expressed a desire to remain until all the dictation was finished.

"I'm not so keen about eating as most people," she said, "and I must say, Mr. Cadman, that I enjoy taking your letters. Old Mr. Page was awfully stiff and old-fashioned, and the manager that came later didn't put much pep into his letters."

"It's a study in itself, of course," said Dick gravely. "A business letter, to be successful in its purpose, must have originality, freshness, and snap; and the psychology of each and every correspondent must be studied as much as possible.

"I'm very careful about avoiding all such old forms as 'Yours received and contents noted,' and 'Your kind favor of recent date,' and all those relics of ancient times. You furnished an example of the effect upon the reader, Miss Hanby, with your kind appreciation just now."

"I like my work," asserted the girl, "and of course it's a pleasure to work with people that are up to date and strictly modern in everything. I suppose Myrtle—that is, Miss Lander—is going to stay on here as bookkeeper. I've been hoping that she would, but I haven't wanted to appear inquisitive about the plans."

"I believe that is the understanding."

"I'm so glad!" exclaimed Miss Hanby blithely. "I didn't know but you would be doing most of the bookkeeping yourself, Mr. Cadman, to keep down expenses at first. In such a case, I was going to say that I could easily do the bookkeeping too; I really have such an easy time here; and I wouldn't ask for any increase in wages. I took bookkeeping at the business college. But there's no need of talking about that now, if Miss Lander is going to stay. I'm awfully glad to hear it; she's such a lovely girl."

"Very nice girl, I'm sure," said Dick smugly, "but of course the mere personality is not to be considered. It's results that we're after, and the personal side of the thing is merely incidental."

Miss Hanby went to luncheon at twelve thirty, and when Tom Brockley came in a few minutes later Dick called both of his partners into the office.

"I have an idea," he announced earnestly. "We're not doing any phenomenal business yet, that's certain; and every cent that can be saved is going to help us along."

"Cheer up!" cried Tom. "I took an order for fifteen dollars' worth of woven-wire fence this morning. I chased up that feller that wrote in for prices. Took the train out to Millville Crossing, and came back by trolley."

"Is that what you're so happy about?" sighed Dick. "Fifteen dollars! Railroad fare, ninety cents; trolley fare, sixty-five cents; and your time to be figured at—oh, whatever it's worth! Where's your profit?"

"Never mind," said Tom cheerfully. "It might have been a hundred-dollar order. You can't take a chance on passing up a prospect, and we may sell the man something else. But what's your big idea?"

"I've been talking with Miss Hanby, and I find that she has been trained as a bookkeeper. She's willing to take on the bookkeeping and continue her secretarial work without any increase in salary."

"She eats work alive, that girl," commented Tom; "but she isn't so much to look at, Dick. The Lander girl has got nice eyes—and I believe in having a few ornaments around the office."

"If you mean that, it's disgusting!" cried Dick.

"All right, be disgusted right here if you want to; don't mind me," said Tom airily. "But you don't have to be a miser to get on in business, Dick; and there's no efficiency in working a girl overtime just because she's willing to be a fool. Don't worry about me, anyhow; I'm not planning any flirtations with the office help; I have a few friends of my own outside my business. As for you, you've been keen about the Hanby girl ever since you found that she saved all the rubber bands."

"I'm keen about anybody or anything that can help to make business successful. Conscientious economy and thrift are very rare qualities."

"I wonder if all Miss Hanby's traits are admirable?" said Harry, breaking into the conversation. "I'm surprised to hear that she would suggest taking Miss Lander's work away from her."

"Quite the contrary," Dick informed him. "She expressed fear that Miss Lander might not be retained, and said some very complimentary things about her. She merely mentioned that she could easily take over all the work in the event of our letting Miss Lander go."

"In other words," chuckled Tom, "she

loves Miss Lander like a sister, but hopes she'll choke to death.

"It may have been right to dissemble your love,
But why did you kick me downstairs?

as Homer said—or was it Mr. Dooley that said it?"

"We've got to stop these constant disagreements, boys," said Harry solemnly, "but I'm going to disagree with Dick again. We told Miss Lander that we would keep her, and as long as her work is satisfactory we must live up to our agreement."

"Perhaps I'm in the best position to judge whether her work is satisfactory or not," returned Dick. "If you want my opinion, her value to the office is negligible; any other trained bookkeeper would do as well."

"Give her a chance," suggested Harry. "She hasn't had time to recover from the lecture that you gave her on her personal affairs. And you ought to be satisfied with the results there: she has removed the plant that offended you, and she hasn't worn flowers in the office since that morning."

"All right," Dick groaned, shrugging his shoulders hopelessly. "We'll call it a draw. I don't know how long we'll keep going at this rate, but we've got to quit this squabbling right now. If you're hungry for another prospect, Tom, there's a more likely one right here in town for you this afternoon. A chap is going to build a garage and service station on Market Street."

"Fine!" Tom exclaimed gleefully. "See 'im to-morrow. This afternoon I have a mixed foursome at the golf club. Miss Telfer, and—"

"Beg your pardon, I'm sure!" said Dick ironically, and flung himself dejectedly into his desk chair.

CHAPTER VII.

REWARD OF MERIT.

WHEN Miss Octavia Wadman, the cherished friend and crony of Mrs. Jane Norcott, visited the new firm's store, Dick and Harry had just gone out to a late luncheon, and Tom had placed Eddie Roker in charge while he slipped out for one of his sudden and apparently mysterious errands.

Octavia, in the late twenties, was a tall, rather finely molded, muscular person, with dark hair, dark eyes, and a clear complexion whose fine texture was innocent of cosmetics. Her eyes were wide open, viewing the world with eager curiosity, and they flashed continuously in the ardor of high purpose.

Eddie Roker was visibly impressed when she swept into the store and asked somewhat haughtily for Mr. Norcott.

"Sorry, ma'am," he said in his most ceremonious manner, "he's just gone to lunch, but he'll be back in no time. Will you take a seat in the office and wait for 'im?"

"Thanks; I'll look about a bit. You are—"

"Eddie—er—I mean, Mr. Roker—I'm the clerk."

"Mr. Norcott has spoken of you, in complimentary terms, I believe."

"He's a fine young man, he's a gentleman, I'll say," Eddie declared earnestly. "Not many like him in the store business, I guess. He's kind of a high class—er—you know—regular high brow, as they say."

"It's all a matter of environment and habits of mind," she explained graciously. "A young man should take good care of his leisure hours. How do you spend your evenings, may I ask?"

Eddie blushed guiltily.

"Oh, I don't do very much," he said, on the defensive. "I have a few friends, y' know, and I go to the theater and the movies some. But I'm a pretty quiet sort of a feller."

"The Public Library is open evenings," said Octavia, "and it is a university for the student who is willing to improve his mind. There are lectures, too, and a young man in business life should keep himself informed upon the living issues of the day."

"I guess you're right," Eddie admitted.

"Dr. Zebrowski is lecturing this evening at the Open Forum on mental hygiene and the development of personality. I'll give you a ticket if you can use it."

"Sure, I'll go," said Eddie dutifully, and was overcome with vague gratitude when he accepted the bit of cardboard and noted that it was marked "One Dollar."

Octavia stalked into the office presently and nodded to the two young women with gracious friendliness.

"I'm Miss Wadman," she announced.

"I am Miss Lander," said the bookkeeper quietly, "and this is Miss Hanby."

"Don't you find it hard to be confined to an office so many hours?" Octavia inquired. "I often wonder how the young woman in business manages to accomplish so much—so many things. You are probably interested in some of the cultural movements—the Working Women's League furnishes such excellent programs! Their free classes in the evening are so helpful, too!"

"I'm pretty tired most evenings," confessed Miss Hanby, "but I went to some of the athletic classes last winter."

"The home-making classes are very valuable," said Octavia. "There are courses in cooking, interior decoration, and sewing, and sanitation. I believe that every young woman should regard herself as a potential housewife. Women must not forget that they are the home makers, and from a successful home they should reach out into politics and the world of culture and civic activity."

"I'm taking a correspondence course in Spanish," said Miss Hanby with evident pride. "It gets you a better job in some lines of business, and you never can tell when you'll be making a change."

"Very wise, I'm sure," Octavia allowed, "but it's very narrowing—don't you think—to concentrate entirely upon business. The business woman, like the business man, should contemplate the matter of marriage and home-making as a citizen's duty; and it is the woman's highest natural function."

"I don't exactly expect to be an old maid," said Miss Hanby, simpering a little, "but, believe me, I'm not a going to take the first man that comes along. I've got plenty of gentleman friends, but I'm going to know something about a fellow's prospects before I give up a good job."

"Do you have time for study or other helpful diversions?" Octavia challenged Miss Lander, who was silent and reserved.

"Oh, yes, thank you," said the bookkeeper.

"Mm—you have a studious manner," observed the inquisitor. "Do you read a great deal, or study?"

"A great deal," said Miss Lander.

"There's so much to read," said Octavia insistently, "but altogether too much trash. I suppose, however, the lighter novels and the magazines appeal to one, after a hard working day."

"I'm reading a biography of Keats just now."

"How wonderful!" cried Octavia, almost incredulously.

"He writes some good ones, all right!" exclaimed Miss Hanby, not to be excluded from the intellectual conversation.

Octavia smiled, but ignored the solecism, and devoted herself to the specimen under the microscope.

"It's so encouraging to find persons with good taste in literature," she said. "I suppose you went through high school, and I dare say you have a home of some refinement and culture."

"I haven't any home," Miss Lander explained simply. "I've been alone for several years."

"Solitude!" remarked the other, "that makes for a studious habit of mind sometimes. And perhaps your parents encouraged your intellectual ambitions when—when they were with you."

"My father was Professor Lander," said the girl. "He wrote a number of books on astronomy and science."

"That's the worst of these professors!" exclaimed Miss Hanby with an air of sympathy. "They never make any money for their families, but they give them expensive tastes. That's how Myrtle gets her craze for flowers and books and all that stuff. My father was a contractor and an alderman, and he made plenty of money, but my oldest brother blew it all in a couple of years. That's why I'm working now."

Octavia Wadman had scarcely recovered her speech.

"I beg your pardon, really," she said presently to the bookkeeper. "I fear I've

been offering suggestions to one that doesn't need them. But it is a bit unusual to—er—that is, I should expect to find you in educational work, or some distinctly intellectual pursuit."

"I chose business," said the girl. "There's work for the mind in that, too, I think; and it offers possibilities for a woman nowadays."

"You're quite right, I'm sure," Octavia conceded. "I must be running along now, I fear. I'll drop in again sometime, when Mr. Norcott is here. Good afternoon."

Miss Lillian Hanby stuck out her lips and made a grimace at the back of the departing visitor.

"Come again soon, and don't stay so long!" she murmured in a low, sneering tone. "Huh! one o' Harry Highbrow's swell lady friends! Didn't think it was funny I wasn't in *some intellectual pursuit,* did she? I should worry about that! Her clothes fit her like a forty-six-stout on a perfect thirty-six. She might land some little shrimp like Han'some Harry, but no regular feller would fall for a jane like her. I hope she's got money for her old age; she'll need it."

"When you're indignant, Lillian," said Miss Lander gently, "you talk like the gum-chewing girls in the Sunday supplements."

"I talk natural, I guess," returned the typist. "Sorry if you don't like it, Miss Professor. I don't have to put on dog all the time like some folks. But I can do it, at that! Give me a feller with about ten thousand a year, and I'll give 'em all a run for their money."

Dick and Harry came back together a little later.

"Miss Wadman was in to see you, Mr. Norcott," said Miss Hanby. "She was very nice, too; so democratic and sociable. She'll be in again, she said to tell you."

"Ah, yes," said Harry; "sorry I was not here."

"No ladies bother themselves about calling on me," Dick complained facetiously, as Harry walked out into the store. "I'm afraid I'm not the popular kind."

"You're lucky!" exclaimed Miss Hanby under her breath, with a roguish glance at Dick Cadman. "I wouldn't want to be popular if it meant to have *some folks* trailing after me."

"A man that's all business," said Dick reflectively, "can't expect to be popular in society unless he makes a lot of money. I've never taken time to be frivolous and sociable."

"That's me!" the typist agreed heartily. "Society doesn't get you anywhere till you've already got there. Pay attention to your job, I say, and the fun will come when it's time for it."

"A good many older people haven't figured the thing out as logically as that," Dick informed her pleasantly. "By the way, Miss Hanby, a friend gave me two complimentary tickets for the musical comedy at the Grand this evening. I don't often take in those things, but these are good seats, and if you'd care about coming along—"

"I shall be more than delighted, Mr. Cadman, and it's very kind of you, I'm sure. Where shall I meet you, and what time?"

"Oh, I'll call for you, of course," said Dick, and blushed like a high-school stripling.

A moment later, as he became furiously busy at his desk, Miss Hanby favored Miss Lander with a sly and expressive wink, and the bookkeeper merely smiled in her noncommittal way.

"Ah-ha, he-hee! Who's demoralizing the office force now?" gloated Tom Brockley, pouncing on Dick Cadman just after five o'clock, when the two girls had been allowed to go home. "The shoe's on the other foot, eh? All right, I suppose, to take 'your official inferiors' to the theater, so long as you don't jolly 'em during office hours?"

"I see no harm in asking Miss Hanby to go to the theater," Dick replied coldly. "And I don't see that it's anyone's business, I'm sure. I suppose Miss Lander has been gossiping about it to Harry."

"I don't gossip with the bookkeeper or the stenographer, nor do they gossip with me, Richard," said Harry dryly. "Tom got his information from some other source."

"Eddie Roker's wise," Tom said frankly. "You can't keep anything from that lad. I don't know where he got it, but I have an idea that our demure stenographer could not keep the secret. Eddie merely breathed in my ear that the lady typewriter chauffeur was all lit up because she'd landed the heavy guy of the firm for a theater date. I wouldn't step on Eddie for that, if I were you, Dick, because they'll have all the more fun about it."

"It was Miss Lander that started it, that's sure," grumbled the angry Dick. "Girls are cats, anyhow. Office rivalry and jealousy! But what of it? Miss Hanby works hard for the interests of this firm, and I thought she deserved some slight reward. I appreciate honest service."

"Why didn't you give her a stick of chewing gum?" Tom inquired fiendishly. "Complimentary theater tickets are all right, but she'll sting you for the car fare both ways, and she may want an ice-cream soda at twenty-five per. It's bad form, too, Dick, for the gent to take a five-cent drink when his jane is lapping up a banana-split. Don't commit any social errors, or you'll lower the dignity of this firm. I'd sooner lend you half a dollar than have such a thing happen."

The habitually grave Harry Norcott snickered with a strangling sound, then burst into noisy guffaws, and antiphonally there came from the outer store a muffled sound of agonized merriment.

It was too much for the tortured Dick, and he swore vociferously, sacrificing all dignity. He banged down the cover of his desk, clapped on his hat, and charged out of the store, hurling back invitations to all those that remained to journey to a place where there are neither theaters nor soda fountains.

CHAPTER VIII.

A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY.

THAT Dick Cadman's evening of unaccustomed frivolity was spoiled before it was well begun, his two partners were gleefully certain, but he resolved on his way home that Miss Hanby, the faithful servitor and the innocent cause of his discomfiture, should know nothing of the ribald merriment of the office.

He called at her boarding-house a little before eight, and they traveled sedately in a trolley car to the theater. Very few persons in Harrowburg donned evening clothes for the theater, and Dick had merely changed his business suit for a well brushed and neatly pressed costume of solemn black.

He noted with comfortable satisfaction, and something of vague relief, that the girl was very plainly and very neatly attired in a manner obviously appropriate to her station, and her natural modesty and quiet taste were attested by the absence of jewelry and other fripperies of a conspicuous sort.

In the theater she took off her hat and disclosed a severely plain coiffure that was in excellent taste and carefully arranged. Her small hands were very white and pretty as they lay in her lap, and he wondered that he had never noticed them as she worked at the type machine in the office. Her profile, too, was something peculiarly new to him, and it was pleasing, but he reflected that he was always utterly absorbed in his work during business hours, and the thought was gratifying.

When the musical comedy began, the girl was delightfully interested in a quiet, well-bred way, and she applauded the solo numbers with a reserve that compared greatly to her credit with the demonstrations of some of the fashionable persons in the orchestra chairs in front of them.

"Isn't it exciting, Mr. Cadman!" she exclaimed, as the curtain fell after the first act. "I suppose a person really gets more enjoyment out of an evening like this, if she doesn't go to the theater very often. I'm thrilled to death! I shall have something to think about for a long time."

Dick, too, was thrilled; very quietly and agreeably thrilled. The show was nothing of great novelty to him, for he often indulged in such diversions during college days, but he was learning something of the profound enjoyment that comes in mature years from the giving of pleasure to other and more dependent creatures. This girl

was refreshingly childlike, it seemed; quite ingenuous and unspoiled in an age of unwholesome sophistication and worldliness.

The riotous second half of the performance filled her with delight, and her soft brown eyes glowed and sparkled as she turned them upon her escort from time to time. Once the young man had a disturbing impulse to clasp the fluttering little hand that inadvertently touched his arm for an instant, but in a moment he was furious with himself for entertaining a thought of such crass sentimentality, and he reflected disgustedly upon the obvious dangers of propinquity.

Presently the curtain was down for the last time, and the pair stood on the sidewalk in the glare of light that made Harrow Avenue the " gay white way " of Harrowburg.

" It's very late, isn't it, Mr. Cadman?" murmured the girl a little timidly. " I hope we haven't missed the eleven o'clock car."

Dick reassured her by a reference to the City Hall clock, which gave them still ten minutes before car time; but he was uneasy and not at all certain of the proper procedure. A sickening echo of Tom Brockley's vulgar taunts about banana-splits and sodas seemed to ring in his ears, and made him feel cheap and mean.

" I was—er—just thinking," he said awkwardly, " that the eleven o'clock car for East End isn't the last car, Miss Hanby. Doesn't a long evening like that make you hungry? I—I think we'd better go somewhere and have a little supper, don't you? Most of the people go to the grill room in the Central Hotel, I believe."

" Oh, Mr. Cadman!" she cried, in some consternation, " I hardly know what to say. I don't often stay out as late as this. Why can't we have just a soda, or something like that? I don't believe in all this extravagance, anyway; the prices of these fashionable restaurants are something outrageous, and it's just a waste of money."

Dick was thrilled again. He felt that he would like to tell some of his pessimistic friends about this young girl who found no attraction in the silliness of the times; of this tender and pretty maiden who had the thrift and sound common sense of an older and more respectable generation. At the same time, however, his gallantry was subtly challenged, and he was suddenly moved to reward such merit.

" Come, come," he said almost gaily, " we're both very sensible persons, I'm sure, Miss Hanby, but this is our night to play and I guess the most sensible persons in the world indulge in a little frivolity now and then. Let's go and see the gay night life of poor old Harrowburg. It will be fun to watch these people who think they are so smart and fashionable."

" Oh, Mr. Cadman!" she cried again, and seemed a bit shocked and flustered; but she rested her hand lightly on his strong arm, and they crossed the avenue to the grill room of the Central Hotel.

Next morning Miss Hanby delivered a report of the evening's entertainment to Miss Lander which was calculated to astonish the latter.

" Don't get the idea that Mr. Cadman is any piker, Myrtle," she said with an air of challenge. " He's all business, that feller, and you'll see him among the top-liners some day; but when he's out with a lady, he's ready to come across like a sport."

"I've always thought him rather shy," said the restrained Miss Lander.

" I don't know but he is," said the other, " but that's sort of a relief after all these fresh guys like Brockley; I know that kind by the dozen, and they keep you too busy handing it back to 'em.

" Mr. Cadman *is* kind o' bashful, but he's a perfect gentleman. He didn't even kiss me when he said good night—and I wouldn't 'a' stopped him, at that; he's a good-looking kid, you must admit. But say! I was going to tell you, he never turned a hair when the waiter at the Central Hotel flashed the check on him. Of course, I didn't try to see how much it was, but he slipped the waiter five berries, and there wasn't much change. He tipped the waiter a quarter, too, and that's enough. It's only the cheap drummers that tip fifty cents or a dollar, and they charge it to the expense account.

" Well, Myrtle, we had a crab-meat cocktail, and then we had chicken *a la* King, though I said the crab-meat was enough by

itself. And then we kept right on and had some strawberry ice cream, and some cake, and demi-tasse. We had imported ginger ale, too, before that, and he never said anything about wishing he had a flask on his hip, and he didn't ask the waiter if he could get us any hooch. I don't like drinking anyhow, and I'm sick of the show-offs that are always pretending to be human tanks. He's a gentleman, Mr. Cadman is."

"We're very fortunate in our employers," remarked Miss Lander. "They're all three very nice, I think."

"Mr. Cadman's the pick of the lot!" the typist declared. "I thought that complimentary ticket business sounded kind o' cheap, but it wasn't. He had the tickets, and it was right to use them, wasn't it? He picked me to go with him, instead of any one else; and he certainly was no tightwad when it came to supper. Tom Brockley's the big noise, and that's about all. They thought he was a joke over to Saxton's when he worked there, and they had him right, too. As for little Harry Brighteyes, he's just too sweet for my taste. He'd be a fine dancing teacher in a young ladies' boarding school."

"Perhaps you're not familiar with people in his class of society," suggested Myrtle Lander.

"Is that so?" snapped the other. "Well, I suppose you *are*, eh? I suppose you take tea with the high-brow swells every afternoon when you're not working. I forgot I was gassin' to a real professor's daughter. Just the same, *Miss* Lander, I can't see this Norcott feller for sour apples! He's too blamed good for any use, always shooting off his mouth about his principles. '*White hyacinths*,' he says that day, butting in on Mr. Cadman's perfectly good talk, and Lord knows what he meant, if he did himself! Looked wise, an' said it was something from some poet.

"I'd hate to live in the same boarding house with a guy like that. I'm glad he stays out in the store with Eddie. Eddie gets some hearty laughs out of 'im; Eddie's fool enough to laugh at anything!"

The three men under discussion arrived presently, one by one, and Dick Cadman was uncomfortably self-conscious. He was unusually ceremonious in bidding the girls good-morning, with a distinct formality toward Miss Hanby, which the latter instantly ascribed to the bashfulness of a man already under the spell of her charms.

"Good show at the Grand last night, Dick?" Tom inquired casually, but caught his partner's eye and grinned offensively.

"Yes," answered Dick curtly, and glared back at him with defiance. "If you don't mind talking business in the office, I think it's about time we were learning something of the specifications on the City Hospital. The Saxtons will be after them as soon as they're obtainable, and I hear that old Hiram King is going to figure on the contract. The rest of the competition will be from out of town, but we've got to watch our friends right here."

"You speak as though it would be sort of a cutthroat affair generally," remarked Harry Norcott.

"You'll learn something, my lad!" exclaimed Tom sagely. "It's the survival of the fittest. Do your neighbor, or be done by him! That City Hospital has got to make a whole lot o' people happy in this town besides the ones that'll have their legs and necks sawed off in it when it's built."

"There's a good deal of bunk in all these mysterious tactics," said Harry. "I still believe that a lot of big business is done right in the open by men with clean hands."

"No such animal," Tom observed, "except a few poor boobs who are already in bankruptcy."

"If we give the contractors the best possible grades of cement, and hardware, and other materials, and allow ourselves lower profits than the other fellows, we ought to win the contracts," said Harry with conviction.

"Mayor Durfey isn't in the contracting business, or the supply business, if you'll stop to think," Dick reminded him.

"Meaning?"

"If you happen to be the type of man that Durfey is, why, what's the use of being mayor of this city if you can't get something out of a new hospital?"

"I'm glad you covered yourself, Dick," Harry said pointedly.. "How would you feel about it, if you were mayor?"

"I hope I'm a little different from the Durfey kind. Education is supposed to do something for a man's character, unless he's all wrong at the start. I guess you know well enough that I wouldn't be getting fat on city contracts."

"It's getting complicated, isn't it?" sighed the other. "You still have your own high standards, yet you're willing to play into the hands of the crooks."

"Business is business!" declared the platitudinous Tom. "Go and ask the old fossil that sells hot dogs every evening on the curbstone in Market Street. He'll tell you that some guy in the City Hall gets a rake-off on every hot dog, or the cops would run him in and give his stand to a bum with more business ability."

"As I was saying before we started the discussion on ethics," muttered Dick sarcastically. "It's about time we were getting on the trail of the contractors' specifications."

"Right-o! I'm on the trail, brother. Watch my smoke!" cried Tom. "Incidentally, yours truly hasn't been either careless or forgetful. I've done a little gum-shoeing already, and I guess I know as much about the organization and the building committee as any little man in the camp."

"Better look up your friend, Mr. Telfer, or Mr. Philip Porter," Dick suggested.

"Porter? Porter? Who's he?"

Dick laughed sardonically.

"While you were gum-shoeing in the dark, Mr. Porter arrived quite openly in broad daylight. I guess everybody in town knows him by this time, except our efficient outside man: he's the resident superintendent for Usher and Vidal, the contractors."

"Rub it in, that's right!" Tom snarled crossly and glared at Miss Hanby, whom he caught in the act of winking covertly at Miss Lander. "You don't think I'm camping at the railroad station to take the name of every man that gets off a train, do you? I'm skirmishing around after all the business that's running loose, while you sit here in an easy chair and strike a trial balance every time Eddie Roker sells a package of carpet tacks."

"All right, Tom, you did a stroke of business for us yesterday, at any rate," Dick laughed. "You played golf all the afternoon, and one of the men that played with you came here later and said you told him that we kept patent picture hangers. It happened that you were right, and the man bought a fifteen cent package. We must admit that you bring in the business."

"I'm glad that you know more about bookkeeping than you do about advertising," retorted Tom, covering his anger with lofty irony. "I'm glad that I got that fifteen cent sale for us: that man is worth a cool half million and he's liable to walk in here any day with a thousand or two to spend. Better get a pair of glasses that'll let you see something beyond your daybook."

Stung by the heckling to which Dick had subjected him, Tom became strenuous for the next few hours. He called up Elsie Telfer and arranged an interview with her father for the evening, and a little while after dinner he was closeted with Martin Telfer at the latter's home.

"I'm glad to hear that you fellows are keen about figuring on those contracts," Telfer said courteously, but appeared to have forgot much of the former talk upon the same subject.

"I want to keep right after them," Tom explained, affecting an air of dogged determination. "We are youngsters in the business, and I'm the only experienced hardware man in the firm, so most of the work falls on me. Cadman merely attends to the office work and correspondence, but he's good at it. Norcott is allowed the place of senior member, as he has some little capital invested, but he's just learning the business; he does what we tell him to do."

"As I recall our talk here the other evening," said Telfer dryly, "he seemed to be telling you and Cadman what to do; and I was not altogether left out of his lecture."

"That was an evening that I hoped to forget," sighed Tom. "I guess you can fancy how embarrassed Cadman and I were. But Norcott is very young in general experience, and he's something of a mother's boy; you know his mother is one of the old-fashioned persons who live in the romantic past. Cadman and I have talked pretty

plainly to him since that evening, and I hope he has come to himself."

"I wasn't offended, Tom, I assure you," Martin Telfer said good-humoredly. "I was young myself, a good many years ago."

"I'm after this man Proctor!" Tom exclaimed fiercely.

"Proctor?" queried the other doubtfully. "I don't know him. You don't mean Philip Porter, do you?"

"Porter! Philip Porter, that's it! He's in town, I hear, to open up the Usher and Vidal offices, but I haven't succeeded in meeting him yet, though I've been camping right on his trail."

"He's quite accessible just now," Telfer said. "You'll find him round the City Hall most of the time, and he's going to open an office in Market Street, I hear. Drop in my office some day and I'll take you around to meet him, if you want an introduction."

"What sort of a chance have we, Mr. Telfer?" demanded Tom, and eyed the older man with the look of a gambler who was prepared to stake all on one throw of the dice.

"Depends on how badly you want the business," Telfer chuckled. "Let's see! There'll be contracts for concrete material, I hear, and roofing slate, and a lot of builder's hardware, and paint, varnish, glass, and all that. Mayor Durfey has an idea of accepting bids for the various kinds of material separately, but it will be possible to make a bid for the whole supply job, if any firm can handle it. Saxton & Son will do that, I suppose, as they handle everything; and old Hiram King is going to attempt something of the sort. The big dealer can figure his profits closer, I fancy."

"We can handle everything, through our connections with the trade," Tom announced importantly. "We stand well with the banks, and they'll give us what help we need if we land the job."

"That's good," Telfer commenced, but seemed rather indifferent. "I have an idea that Saxton & Son will give you a close rub. Rufus Saxton is an old hand, you know. He knows the game, and he knows Roscoe Durfey; he helped to put him in the City Hall."

Tom's courage began to flatten out, and he felt rather helpless in the face of Telfer's unexpected indifference.

"I'm not setting myself up to know all the ropes," he said, more humbly. "I'm young, and so are my partners. I guess we need a little advice, Mr. Telfer. We can't afford to sacrifice everything for the sake of landing the contract, for that would end in bankruptcy, but we'll be satisfied with a mighty small margin of profit."

Telfer smiled enigmatically.

"Our overhead is light," Tom continued, "and we're not drawing much out of the business for personal use. I'm sure we could figure the thing down pretty close to costs."

"And then figure the costs down pretty close, too," suggested Telfer slyly.

"I see what you mean!" Tom exclaimed, though he was a little puzzled.

"It often happens that first-grade material seems to suffer some deterioration in the process of procurement and delivery," Telfer said helpfully. "You'll need all your experience, Tom, and you fellows will have to do some close buying."

"Usher & Vidal are pretty high-class contractors," suggested Tom doubtfully. "I wouldn't want any trouble with them on a show-down."

"The concrete will have to be pretty good," Telfer said thoughtfully. "I believe, however, that certain hardware, and paint, and things of that sort are rather variable. Mayor Durfey got Usher & Vidal to send Mr. Porter here as their superintendent; I believe that he knows him pretty well."

"I don't know the Mayor as well as I wish I did," Tom admitted frankly.

"Well, come around and I'll take you in to see him," Telfer laughed indulgently.

"By Jove! will you do that?" cried the young man, and jumped up to shake hands with his host in an access of gratitude.

"That's a simple matter," said Telfer guardedly. "Drop in some time tomorrow."

Tom left Martin Telfer's library with renewed courage and enthusiasm, and went to the front of the house, where Elsie waited to greet him.

"I don't see what men find to talk about so long!" she exclaimed.

"Business!" cried Tom, throwing himself into a big chair with the relaxed manner of a man who has returned from battle victorious. "Business, with a great big capital 'B!' Don't breathe it to your right hand, Elsie, but I think we have 'em on the run."

"It's about that awful City Hospital contract, isn't it?" she whispered, with proper awe. "But aren't you scared, Tom, to be tackling such a—a gigantic proposition?"

"If I was scared," he said largely, "I wouldn't be bucking competition in a business as strenuous as the one I'm in. And listen here, Elsie: I wouldn't be dreaming dreams about the loveliest, sweetest girl in the world."

"There, there; that will do!" she cautioned sternly. "Mustn't get too sentimental in your enthusiasm, Mr. Brockley."

"There wouldn't be any enthusiasm for me, if it were not for you, Elsie!" he whispered hoarsely. "Listen! I'm going to get that contract! You can't stop me when I'm dead set for a thing. I've got it now! I defy anybody to take it away from me!"

"Tom! I never saw you in such a mood!" she cried, with a little shivering gurgle of delight.

"I'm out to win!" he declared, rising and striking an attitude of heroic determination. "I'm going to win the world's greatest prize —*you!*"

"Don't be so wild, Tom," she protested nervously. "What would father say?"

"Your father is my friend, Elsie," he assured her proudly. "I—I don't need help when I've set myself for a race, but—I'm happy to think that your father is my friend. He's going to take me to talk with the mayor to-morrow. That's the end! It's victory!"

"Tom, how wonderful!" she gasped.

He caught her hands in his and drew her toward him.

"No, no, Tom! You mustn't, you know!" she scolded, struggling to escape.

But the young man had worked himself into an ecstasy, an intoxication.

"I must! I must! Elsie, the world is mine!" he cried, and clasped her in a wild embrace, then kissed her on the lips with an ardor that was overwhelming.

"Come in about eleven o'clock, Brockley," said Martin Telfer, appearing suddenly in the doorway; then: "Great Heavens! Say! Oh, gosh!"

Elsie screamed shrilly and tried to get away, but Tom held her hands firmly and faced the music like a hero.

"I'm proud to say that I love your daughter, Mr. Telfer!" he announced.

"I hope you do," said the father; "I assumed something of the kind on the present evidence."

"I shall try to live—I shall try to make myself worthy of her—worthy of such a prize!" Tom declared.

"I trust you will, my boy," said Telfer. "And, say, you'd better make that about ten o'clock to-morrow. We ought to have another little talk before we see the Mayor. I can see, now, that you need a little help in that business of yours."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TANGLED WEB.

TOM BROCKLEY entered his office early next morning with antics unbecoming his years. Instead of walking, he hopped and skipped. If there was a chair in his way, he vaulted it. His good morning to his partners was usually blithe and cheerful, but this time he expressed his brotherly affection by assault and battery, fetching each of them in turn a staggering wallop on the back.

"Morning, sister!" he shouted at Miss Hanby, and slapped her playfully on the shoulder.

"*If* you don't mind, Mr. Brockley," she gasped, half rising, "I'd rather you wouldn't—"

"Don't you care!" he gurgled idiotically, hopping on one foot and cutting a pigeon-wing. "I'm a little crazy this morning. I got a right to be! I got a right to be!"

"Calm yourself, Tom," said the visibly disturbed Dick. "What's the matter with you? Have you sold a ten cent rat trap to some one?"

"Nay, nay, Richard!—but I've made the greatest sale of all. I've sold my name!—my future—I've sold *myself*—to the queen of love and beauty! I'm engaged, ladies and gentlemen, engaged!"

"Who is the *lucky* girl?" demanded Harry sourly.

"It's still a secret," Tom answered fatuously. "Mustn't tell if I tell you. Hasn't been announced yet. I'm engaged to Elsie Telfer!"

The three young men had romped, in their various ways, through college together, and they were still young. Tom's ill-considered garrulity and gayety were infectious at the moment, and Dick and Harry suddenly sacrificed the precious dignity of the office.

"Kill 'im while he's happy!" cried Harry, and hurled a book at Tom.

Dick caught up a waste paper basket and tried to invert it over the victim's head like an extinguisher. Tom broke away, hurdled a small table, and dashed out into the store, hotly pursued by his two partners.

Miss Lilian Hanby, who had once informed Miss Lander that she was merely natural on occasions of stress, rolled her eyes upward, hunched her shoulders, stuck out her tongue, and assumed an expression that was all too suggestive of nausea.

"Him!" she exclaimed, recovering from the spasm, and giving the simple pronoun the value of a dozen qualifying adjectives.

"You never can tell, you know," said Myrtle Lander mildly.

"Elsie Telfer!" mumbled Miss Hanby, still suffering. "Ever see 'er? Of course—everybody has. She's got the looks, I suppose, if you like that type. Kind o' Chinese looking—slant eyes and a wide mouth. She's got rusty hair, and she's pink and white. I guess she knows how to make-up pretty well. And she's *chic*, I'll say that for 'er. She's got the rags, and she knows how to put 'em on.

"But *him!*" she went on, taking breath, and appeared to become ill again. "Say, Myrtle, he's a word of sixteen letters, meaning—meaning a half portion o' nothing! Blah! How do they do it? Ask me!"

"We all see things from our own peculiar angles, I suppose," said Miss Lander.

"Is zat so? Well, Elsie Telfer must 'a' seen that guy standing on her head, lookin' at 'im on the bias, with her eyes shut. The only good-looking thing about Brockley is his back, when he's going out—take it from me! And with her money! And she travels with the fast steppers, too! I give it up, Myrtle, I give it up! Darwin was right!"

Tom did not come back into the office after the steeplechase through the store and stock rooms. He hurried off to keep his appointment with Mr. Telfer, and Dick and Harry returned more or less disheveled and out of breath.

"A very happy morning for Mr. Brockley, isn't it?" Miss Hanby said sweetly to Dick.

"I guess it is," he answered. "Miss Telfer's a charming young lady."

"Nothing the matter with Tom, either," said Harry loyally, speaking to Dick. "I think the girl is in luck, too. She's got a good fellow—old Tom!—and they don't grow on every bush. He's still as much of a kid as he was at college, but I always liked Tom."

"I'm sure I hope I didn't offend him," said Miss Hanby anxiously. "He's always making fun for the office, you know, but he startled me when he—when he touched my shoulder. A business girl has to be careful about gentlemen taking liberties, or they lose respect for her."

"You're quite right," said Dick heartily. "Tom will understand when he stops to think about it."

Tom returned at noon, entering the office with martial tread and the bold look of a conqueror.

"The keys of the city!" he exclaimed, bombastic as a schoolboy. "Got 'em handed me by the Lord Mayor on a gold platter. Anything you want unlocked? All the world loves a lover! Mr. Telfer introduced me as his beloved future son-in-law, and his honor fell on his face and kissed my feet. I congratulate you Richard S. Cadman, upon having me for a partner and friend."

Dick had recovered from the ebullient spirits of the early morning, and was worried about the *morale* of the office. He

smiled with dignity and squelched Tom with a glance.

"If the young ladies care to go out to lunch now," he said, "we will call Harry in and have a conference upon what you have learned at the City Hall."

The girls withdrew with alacrity, but Tom checked Dick mysteriously as the latter started to summon the third partner.

"Listen here!" he whispered sternly. "Not a word to Harry about anything like graft. Understand? No discussions! We've got to play the game, and I've got it all doped out. It'll be straight sailing. If Harry doesn't get wise to certain little things it won't hurt anybody, and he'll be all the happier. Get me?"

Dick nodded a little doubtfully, a little anxiously, but allowed Tom to call Harry.

"I have the specifications," Tom announced.

"How much did the Mayor charge you for them?" Harry inquired suspiciously.

"Nothing like that! This is a perfectly good, straight game, Hal. The specifications are not ready for publication, but the Mayor gave me an advance copy and, just to be perfectly fair, he's going to give the same thing to Saxton & Son, and to Hiram King to-day. Local houses are to have the preference, though the competition is open to all comers. Mayor Durfey says the contract is really not big enough to cause much excitement among the big people, and he hopes that it will go to a local dealer. Keep the city's money in the city; that's what he wants to do."

Tom spread the specifications upon a table and the three went over them hurriedly, noting tentatively the most important items.

"If we could buy for cash, or short term notes, it would be easy," Dick remarked, "but we've got to hold everybody up until we get our money on the contract."

"Our credit's all right," said Tom. "We haven't strained it, so far, and if we land this it will make us popular. Porter, the Usher & Vidal man, has said unofficially that the figures will total somewhere around sixty thousand at current rates. The bids will be expected to range from that downward. The business may be split up into separate contracts among several dealers, but Porter thinks they'd prefer to buy everything from one house, if the bids warrant it."

"It looks simple enough," Harry observed, "but it's all new to me. I can't see what good it would do Saxton & Son to get the contract unless there were good profits for them in it; they're established, and the triumph wouldn't mean much to them. It must be the same with Hiram King, too: he has made some money in past years, and nothing interests him unless he can see a profit. If we figure every blessed item down to a hair-line above cost and protect ourselves on the credit question and the handling we ought to underbid everybody. We're agents for the cement people, and they can't quote anything under our price without breaking with us. It wouldn't pay them to do that."

"It looks to me like easy money," said the optimistic Tom. "We'd better stay here and work to-night. I'll go over the cost books that we have now, and Dick can draft some diplomatic letters to the wholesale trade and the brokers. Keep everything under your hats until we file our bid and get the answer."

"Everything goes in the safe when we're not working on it," said Dick, "and the safe will be kept locked from now on."

Harry returned to the front of the store to allow Eddie Roker to go out to lunch, and Dick cornered Tom for a moment of intensive inquiry.

"What's the answer?" he demanded pointedly. "Just how deep is the water that this is getting us into?"

"It's a clean proposition," Tom assured him; "a lot cleaner than most political affairs. We're grown men, Dick, and we know better than to be squeamish about small matters."

"I know all that," snapped Dick impatiently. "Here's the rub, as I see it: Harry is going to help us figure the whole thing down to rock-bottom. You mentioned graft to me before he came in. If we're eliminating everything but a merely nominal profit, where's the graft coming from?"

Tom laughed nervously and fidgeted.

"If you want to know," he answered, "I'm putting my own neck in the noose—just as a sporting proposition. We've got other contracts coming to us, if we play the game. The Mayor has guaranteed me the business of the Board of Public Works for next year, if we get this contract.

"Now get this!" he went on earnestly. "There's been not a word of bribery, or anything like that. It's a gentlemen's agreement. Durfey needs money for next election—and that's all right; he's got to have it, or be beaten by some one that does have it. Mr. Telfer has come across with a little contribution, on general principles. And—between you and me, Dick, my father has put in something; he's got a personal interest in the City Hospital proposition, and he's killing two birds with one stone. Then I did the thing up brown this morning by slipping his honor a thousand dollars for the campaign fund."

"A thousand!" gasped Dick. "You never had a thousand dollars at one time in your life!"

"You're digging into my private affairs, Dickie, but that's all right. I have connections, now, I might say. Mr. Telfer advanced me the thousand on my note. I have faith in this business, you see. A few months from now I can draw a few hundred from the business without hurting any one's feelings, I hope."

Dick shook his head doubtfully and looked glum.

"It's pretty fishy business, Tom! However, I can't say that you're not a sport. I haven't any money now, and I can't borrow; but we'll split that note of yours even, when the time comes. Pretty decent of your future father-in-law to lend it to you."

"It's a long game, Dickie," said Tom wisely, "and we're going to play it. Roscoe Durfey is a winner, and he'll be a winner for a long time. He's pretty thick with Mr. Telfer, and he just as good as invited me to get into the game on his side. This contract is all fixed—take it from me!—but it's a mere piker's game. The melons will be cut in the future. We'll supply the city of Harrowburg with everything it needs in our line, and in a few months Saxton & Son won't be regarded as competitors of ours; they'll be small dealers, and we'll be selling them goods."

"I hope we don't wake up with a sudden bump," said Dick, but he smiled hopefully.

"You can see now," Tom went on glibly, "why it's unnecessary to give poor old Harry any needless worry. He's a good lad, Dick, but it's a question how long he'll be in the business. Let him have his way, and he'd sit on a monument and shoo away all business that wasn't done according to the standards of the Norcott family. They say his father was so straight that he almost fell over backward when he walked, but the old man was a joke even in his own day; Don Quixote and the windmills all over again."

"It's not square to treat him like this," said Dick, with a twinge of conscience, "but we can't have the whole show ruined on his account. It looks to me, now, as though you and I could swing it by ourselves. If Harry gets wise later on we may be able to buy him out and let him go."

CHAPTER X.

SHIFTING SANDS.

As the days passed, leading to the date on which the competitive bids were to be submitted, Harry Norcott gave his mother glowing reports of the firm's prospects. He had gained confidence from the swaggering assurance of Tom, and the figures that the three partners were preparing at secret sessions in the office were eloquent of promise.

"We are sacrificing everything in the way of gain, to get that contract for ourselves," he told his mother, "and I don't see how it can go wrong. Graft simply doesn't enter into the situation. I dare say this Mayor Durfey isn't as bad as he's been painted; and then the reputation of Usher and Vidal is a guarantee of good faith."

"It's very odd, how things come about," said Mrs. Norcott mysteriously. "I never had any interest in the hardware business before, and I never had occasion to give a thought to the existence of such a business; but now it seems to figure very prominently in the affairs of the world.

"I took the train over to Jamesville this morning, to attend a luncheon of the Women's Civic League there, and, quite by chance, I learned of the closing out of a very fine stock of hardware. The store is closed, it seems, and the stock is to be sold to settle an estate. I made inquiries, and it appears that any reasonable cash offer would be considered favorably; otherwise there will be a public auction."

"We might go over there and look it over," said Harry. "If it could be used toward filling the contract — paints, oils, builder's hardware, and that sort of thing— we might reduce our present figures. But the cash! Where could we get the cash?"

"I took pains to learn something of the value of the stock," said Mrs. Norcott proudly, "and it is said to be in excellent condition. The attorney for the estate claims that it is worth easily six thousand, and it is thought that half that sum would be accepted as a cash offer."

"I'll put it up to the boys," said Harry.

"And you may tell them this, my dear," she added fondly. "If the stock is acceptable, and would aid you greatly in making the lowest bid, I will dispose of some securities and advance your firm as much as three thousand dollars."

"That's bully, mother!" he cried excitedly. "It may be the making of us, you know."

Next day, after a conference, Tom went with him to Jamesville, and when they returned to the office at night they reported to Dick the purchase of the entire stock.

"You didn't jump at it too impulsively, I hope," said Dick.

"It's a bonanza!" Tom assured him. "One o' the finds of a lifetime! The stock's as good as new, and it's lucky for us that it wasn't advertised before Harry's mother spotted it. It 'll cut our figures below anything that Saxton could ever stand. It cinches the whole proposition."

"I'm wondering what Rufus Saxton is up to," said Dick. "You will find in the evening paper that Saxton's friends are talking of running him for mayor against Roscoe Durfey's reëlection."

"Not a reform candidate, that's sure!" Tom exclaimed. "Rufus Saxton is as deep in the mire as Durfey is in the mud. But that clears up some things for me, too. I thought that Saxton helped to put Durfey in office, but when I talked with the mayor he didn't speak of Saxton with much affection. I noticed it at the time. I guess that figures out as pretty good news, Dickie. The city won't be likely to award a contract to an enemy of the administration."

The stock of the Jamesville store was promptly transferred to the storerooms of its purchasers, and after they had made a careful inventory and inspection they proceeded to revise their bid for the city contract.

The contract was, according to Tom's dictum from his new heights of grandeur, a "mere piker's game," but the winning of it engrossed the thoughts of a number of persons during the period of suspense.

Mrs. Jane Norcott, as Harry warned his partners, could ill afford to risk three thousand dollars upon anything but a sure-fire venture. Her confidence, however, was as firm as that of her son. Only Tom and Dick were aware that Dr. Brockley had staked some portion of his meager savings upon his son's enterprise, with the hope of advancing his own fortunes, but Tom was not worried about the outcome, and he congratulated his father upon his good sense in getting into a winning team.

Martin Telfer was evidently fond of Tom, for he had accepted his daughter's judgment with regard to the young man, and he was giving him the support of a political influence that many a better known citizen would have regarded as the open sesame to assured success.

As for the lovely Elsie, she entered zealously into the excitement attending the venture of her betrothed as soon as she yielded to his suit, and she took care that her father's interest in the young man should not flag.

In the office, the employees gave evidence of their attachment to their new employers. Eddie Roker "rooted" for the firm as he did for the local baseball team, and made bets with his cronies upon the outcome of the competition. Myrtle Lander had, as usual, little to say, but she brightened with eager interest when there was any open

discussion. Lilian Hanby, on the other hand, talked freely of the coming glory for her superiors and predicted the lasting defeat of all competition.

" I'm never curious about the confidential business of my employers, Mr. Cadman," she said to Dick, during morning dictation, " but I would like to have you know that this competition means as much to me as though I were in the business myself. I —I don't know how I could stand it if you gentlemen should lose out."

" Thank you very much, Miss Hanby," said Dick, without looking up from his papers. " And now will you take a letter to Yates & Co., of Pittsburgh?"

" Say, Myrtle, would you take that as a slam—what Cadman said to me?" demanded the stenographer when Dick stepped out for a moment. " Maybe I didn't make so much of a hit with 'im that night at the theater. He hasn't said anything about calling on me, and a gentleman most always does, after he's taken you out. Oh, well, my young life isn't all bound up in him, and I've got a few friends left."

" You're too sensitive, Lilian," said Miss Lander. " Poor Mr. Cadman is living up to a reputation for order and efficiency, and he simply can't unbend here in the office—certainly not before a third person. You ought to give him more time, and you shouldn't get conversational with him when I am here."

The stenographer was moodily silent the rest of the morning, and went out to lunch alone, though she usually asked Miss Lander to accompany her. Then, during the afternoon she sulked and complained of a headache, but triumph waited for her in the evening.

" I dislike very much to ask any one to work after hours, Miss Hanby," Dick said to her, " but I hope it may be convenient for you to come back here this evening after supper. You will be paid for it at an increased rate, of course."

" It will be a pleasure, Mr. Cadman," she assured him, " and I'd rather not take any extra wages for it."

" The work is very important," Dick explained in a confidential tone. " I am going to ask you to type the estimate that we have made upon the city contract, and of course you understand the vital necessity of secrecy.

" You may take the request as a tribute, I think, for I personally should not intrust such a service to any one that I did not feel to be very reliable."

" You may be sure I appreciate the compliment, Mr. Cadman," she said, and glanced toward Myrtle Lander to see if she was listening.

" We've discussed the question—my partners and I," he continued, apparently anxious to impress her duly, " and the suggestion was made that the work might be taken to a special stenographer out of town, but I think I convinced my partners that our secrets were perfectly secure in your hands."

" It's a great satisfaction to know that you feel that way, Mr. Cadman," she said, and there was a suspicion of a break in her voice, which made Dick glance at her nervously.

At his suggestion she went out early for supper, and Myrtle Lander noted that she carried herself jauntily once more. The headache was gone, and she favored Myrtle with a little pitying smile as she went out.

Dick went to his home for supper—the Cadmans did not dine at night—and he was secretly congratulating himself that his parents had no stake in the enterprise, when his father suddenly descended upon him in unusual excitement.

" Well, Dick, your old man took the bull by the horns this afternoon," he said. " I got to thinking that I'd sat on the fence too long, watching the parade go by. Here's Tom Brockley's father with a finger in the pie, as you said, and old Jane Norcott putting up all that her husband left her. I just got my dander up, and I brushed my shoes and slicked down my hair, an' then I walked right in on Roscoe Durfey. 'Who are you?' he says, an' I told 'im I'd worked right there in that City Hall all the years that he'd been growin' up to his present high position. I told 'im he was the best mayor the city had had since I was working for it, and he didn't dispute my statement."

" All right, go on," said Dick nervously. " What were you getting at?"

"I think I done right," said Mr. Cadman. "I borrowed a hundred dollars on my insurance policy, and I handed 'im the whole bank roll as a little contribution to his campaign fund.

"Told 'im it was for the good of the city, and he grinned. He's nobody's fool, that man Durfey! He asked me then what I wanted for myself, and I told him right off that I was hoping my son's hardware house would land the hospital contract, and I wouldn't mind if there should be a little better job for me somewhere. He said I was a good feller, and he'd keep me in mind. He said Tom Brockley was a good feller, too, and that all Martin Telfer's friends were friends of his."

Dick sighed, but smiled patiently at the superannuated city servant.

"I guess it was all right, dad," he said kindly; "and of course every little bit helps. But I wouldn't do any more rooting like that if I were you. I haven't much use for this sweetening of the political jackpot myself, and I'm going to steer clear of politicians if we get through this affair all right."

Back at the office the three young men went over their figures again, and then Dick read them slowly and carefully to Miss Hanby as she prepared the momentous document on the type machine. It was midnight when the work was done, and there were ten pages of the estimate, with four carbon copies. The papers were locked in the safe, and then Dick telephoned for a taxicab and took Miss Hanby home.

Ah her boarding house he thanked her again for the unusual and conscientious service, then alighted from the cab and handed her out very gallantly.

"Thank you for bringing me home, Mr. Cadman," she said feelingly, and gave him her hand with a little gesture of friendliness. "As I said before, it was a pleasure to do it; and I'd like to tell you, Mr. Cadman, that it's always a pleasure to work for a gentleman like you."

Dick was tired, and any show of sentiment always made him nervous.

"Oh, thanks," he said lightly as he stepped back into the cab. "Good night, Miss Hanby."

"Well, that feller certainly is a clam: he wouldn't even squeeze my hand!" said the stenographer to herself, and hurried into the house in a mood of exasperation.

In the cab, however, Dick was not unpleasantly pensive as he enjoyed the luxury of riding to his own home. Miss Hanby, he reflected, was a very worthy young woman; perhaps not as attractive as Tom Brockley's vivacious *fiancée,* but possibly more steady and reliable. The firm was very fortunate in having so efficient an employee.

Altogether he was comfortably satisfied with the night's work, and Tom and Harry had appeared to be sanguine of success. On prices current they had taken the trouble to estimate that a house like that of Saxton & Son would be very unlikely to make the figure for the entire contract less than fifty-five thousand dollars. On their final revision, their own estimate was exactly fifty thousand dollars, and they knew that such a figure would be hard to beat.

Tom Brockley taped and sealed the papers in an impressive packet next day, and delivered them himself to the office of Mr. Porter, of the construction company, who personally gave a receipt for them and locked the packet in his own safe.

After that there were two tedious weeks of waiting, and the three young men developed three separate and distinct cases of "nerves," and were not easy to work with in an office where the air was charged with suspense and a tingling anxiety.

Martin Telfer reassured Tom from time to time with reports of Mayor Durfey's growing enmity toward Rufus Saxton, and all such rumors were music to the ears of the impatient partners.

The final week came, and the day before the decision was to be published, Eddie Roker spoke earnestly and confidentially to Harry Norcott.

"I wouldn't want you to think I was fresh or impudent, Mr. Norcott," he said, "but would you be surprised if I said I knew what your bid was on that contract?"

"What do you mean, Eddie?" exclaimed Harry, startled.

"Your bid was fifty thousand dollars, wasn't it?" Eddie said soberly. "Say, Mr.

Norcott, I'm keeping company with a young lady that works for Saxton & Son. She told me what your bid was, and she heard about it in the office of her boss. It's none o' my business, but I thought perhaps you ought to know."

Harry was staggered, but he waited until he had his partners alone at six o'clock before he told them.

"All right, what if they *do* know?" said Tom after the first shock. "I'm not particularly alarmed. They know that they're beaten, I guess, and that's all the good they'll get from the information."

"But where was the leak?" demanded Dick. "That's the question!"

"You know what I said about female stenographers in general," said Tom.

"Miss Hanby is above suspicion," returned Dick. "I trust her as much as I trust you two fellows. I can't think how the figures could be known to any one else, but the safe has been open from time to time. I'm not suspecting any one yet, but Miss Lander has never appealed to me very much."

"I wouldn't dream of suspecting her," said Harry. "She's superior to her job, and she's not the type that does things of that sort."

"Why not suspect some one in Porter's office while we're about it?" suggested Tom. "A good many persons have got a hen on the nest. But why should we worry? We'll do a little quiet pussyfooting on this case for our own satisfaction; but to-morrow will tell the story, and I guess it 'll be a happy ending."

The morning papers announced that the early political flurry in the city had been quieted by Rufus F. Saxton, who stated that he had declined to run against Roscoe Durfey in the coming campaign, and, furthermore, that he would support Durfey for reëlection.

While Tom, Dick and Harry were discussing this development a messenger brought in a letter from the office of Philip Porter, and Dick seized it and opened it with trembling fingers. He spread the sheet on his desk, and Tom and Harry read it with him.

GENTLEMEN:

I regret to inform you that, in conference with the mayor of the city, and with the mayor's committee, I am obliged to reject your very liberal estimate of fifty thousand dollars, in favor of the estimate of Rufus F. Saxton & Son, who named a figure of forty-nine thousand dollars.

Very truly yours,
(Signed) PHILIP O. PORTER.

"Stung!" cried Tom explosively. "The dirty robbers! Double-crossed! Played for suckers! Wait till I see Mr. Telfer. I'll make somebody sweat!"

Dick sat down suddenly, silent and very pale.

"What's the use?" he asked presently. "We're beaten, aren't we? I guess the laugh is on us for a parcel of precious fools!"

"Beaten?" cried Harry Norcott. "Who's beaten? You two—with all your *experience,* and your efficiency! I'm not beaten! I'm going to find out who sold us out! Then I'm going to find out how Saxton & Son can furnish material to the city below cost. The show is just beginning!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

THE 197TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

NORTH STAR

BY RUFUS KING

Author of "Wild Waves," etc.

(ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, February 7 to March 7, 1925.)

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What a Knight!

By WALTER A. SINCLAIR

TWO knights in shining armor tilted across the greensward with their lances couched. From helmets to sabbatons they were in glistening steel, which reflected the sun of a summer's afternoon. Right chivalrously they jousted with many a "Have at you!"

Simultaneously their lances clashed and the steed which one bestrode stumbled. Its rider lurched forward and downward. As he did so the end of his opponent's lance struck him through the helmet opening. Knocked clear out of the saddle, the unhorsed knight crashed in a motionless heap on the ground.

It all happened in a moment. While the riderless horse jogged on a few paces the victorious knight jerked his mount to a halt. Four men on foot ran toward the unhorsed one.

The foremost, in breeches, puttees and the usual directorial accessories, threw down his megaphone as he ran. At his heels were the assistant cameraman and the props-utility man. Even the cameraman joined them after winding a few feet of film to protect the exposed footage.

They knelt in an excited group around the motionless figure huddled on the turf, muttering dismayed or impatient exclamations.

Towering above them sat the most dismayed person present. When the victorious knight, with trembling hand, raised the visor which had persisted in dropping at the most inopportune times, he revealed a worried face.

Don Kimball, a rodeo rider from Wyoming, who had remained East to do rough riding for the motion pictures, was badly shaken by what had happened. He and Stacey had been engaged to stage a tilt for a screen comedy. Just a bit, for a flash-back to be shown in contrast with modern methods of winning a lady fair. A little touch of action which could be entitled "In olden days rivals settled it thus." This would be followed by the melancholy comedy star's inimitable method of winning a girl.

Don and Stacey had motored out from New York to the remote location, with Cornwell, the assistant director; Ericsson, the photographer, and Lavorese, his helper. Haley, the props, was waiting with two robust white horses which had had screen experience in a big costume photodrama of knight time.

Kimball and Stacey had been hoisted to their saddles after being incased in really fine steel replicas of what the well dressed fifteenth century knight wore. Their rehearsals had been satisfactory. The knights were to tilt smartly at one another with lances aimed at breastplates.

The tips of the lances were of hard rubber which photographed realistically as steel. These were slipped over the ends of the wooden lances much as the rubber tip of a teacher's pointer is fitted.

"My tip was knocked off when our lances hit," mourned Don, displaying his weapon ruefully. "His horse stumbled. I must have caught him squarely between the eyes. Gee, I'm sorry. Is he—badly hurt?"

"Unconscious," replied Cornwell, bending over the lifeless Stacey. "Maybe a fracture. You know how it stuns to walk into the edge of a door in the dark."

"Can't I do something?" asked Don, anxiously.

"Haley, you grab Stacey's horse and ride down the road, that way," ordered Cornwell, indicating the direction. "Stop at the nearest house and telephone for an ambulance and a doctor. And you, Don, go the other way until you strike a house. Might as well make doubly sure of getting help at once. Tell 'em to turn in at Judson's meadow, back from the Suffolk road. Hurry. Don't stop for anything."

And so, to succor a fallen opponent in the lists of chivalry Don Kimball, knight by the day, galloped through the wooded lane and turned into the Long Island highway. Haley, riding more lightly, was racing out of sight in the opposite direction as Don clattered along.

This was an isolated stretch, selected for privacy in "shooting." Trees screened both sides of the road. A half mile down this highway Don turned in at a driveway leading to a rather plain though substantial old house. It was one of those big, solid old farmhouses which had stood a century to prove its enduring qualities. The grounds were smartly hedged and a modern garage stood well back.

In spite of the weight of his armor, Don managed to slip gently from the saddle and hurry to the side door nearest the driveway.

Through the glass he saw a young woman struggling with a hard-faced, wiry fellow who held a small revolver in his right hand. As Don seized the door knob the man brought down the gun butt on the girl's head. Without a sound she slipped to the floor and lay quiet.

Don Kimball threw himself against the door, but it was locked. At the sound the man indoors turned sharply and appeared paralyzed with amazement at the sight of this medieval apparition. At the same moment Don's mailed fist crashed through the door glass and sought the inner lock-release.

The man in the room had started to back away, but as Don lumbered through the door he wheeled. His was the face of a cornered rat as he swung up his small, cheap weapon.

"Back!" he warned in an excited squeak. Then, as Don lurched forward, he fired, point blank, at close range.

With a crash, steel took a sensational drop to the floor. Waving his revolver, the wiry rogue made a standing broad jump across the fallen knight and out through the door. In a few seconds he had disappeared in the shrubbery.

Don rolled over on his front and used hands and knees to rise. Though his curved breastplate of steel had deflected the hastily-fired bullet, the impact of speeding lead had knocked him down as he instinctively dodged backward before the shot. Weighted as he was, Don realized the uselessness of trying to pursue his assailant.

He turned to the stunned girl. She was fetchingly garbed in maid's attire—regular stage maid costume, Don reflected. He had seen plays where the maid was togged out that way, with a natty black satin frock, black silk stockings and patent leather shoes, a frilly little apron and cap. Never

had he seen a stage maid who looked slicker than this girl, with her curly black hair.

He cast about for first aid.

They were in the dining room. A sweating silver pitcher on the sideboard advertised that it held ice water. Into this he dipped a napkin and bathed the girl's face.

It was uncomfortable business, kneeling in those Harveyized plus fours, and Don experienced a feeling of relief when the girl's eyelids fluttered open. For an instant she stared in startled wonderment and then hastily closed her eyes.

Puzzled, but anxious to please, Don slid one steel-clad arm beneath her neck and raised the girl to a reclining posture against his left knee. She winced slightly, and then he realized that his brazzard was not as comfortable as the sleeve of a silk shirt. He hardly would favor it himself for sports wear, this plate steel armlet with its great elbow cop.

The girl's face revealed that she was mustering up her courage for something. Then she opened her eyes again. Her field of vision was filled completely with steel haberdashery, relieved by a worried face peering through the front opening of a steel helmet. Writhing slightly in that metallic embrace, she turned her gaze to the ceiling.

"Oh, what a relief!" she gasped in unfeigned joy, as she recognized her surroundings. "For a moment I thought that wallop had turned me back like the hero in 'A Yankee in King Arthur's Court.' What—?"

"That fellow was clouting you, so I bu'sted in," explained Don, laboriously rising with the girl in his arms. "If there's a couch or something I can put you on till you feel better—"

"In there," she replied, indicating the way. Her gaze strayed towards the shattered glass of the door.

"Sorry, but I had to break in. Door was locked," apologized Don as he teetered into the comfortable living room and deposited the girl on a comfortable divan. She patted his shoulder reassuringly, but instantly realized that his metal sheathing probably deadened her message.

Having made her comfortable, Don thrust back his visor again, and glanced admiringly around the place. He was surprised at the evidences of wealth within what he had supposed to be a very plain farmhouse. Coming from the range, Don did not know that the art of doing over sturdy old Long Island farmhouses into comfortable, expensively-furnished homes was quite the thing among the well-to-do.

"May I use your telephone," he inquired, suddenly remembering his mission.

Puzzled, the girl nodded, and gestured that the instrument was in the room he had quitted. A few minutes he wasted in futile effort to raise the operator before noticing the general deadness of the instrument.

He turned back to the girl, wondering what to do. She undoubtedly needed his protection, and probably Haley had put in the call for an ambulance.

"Guess the wire's cut," he announced. The girl was sitting up and smiling inquiringly although she still touched the cold cloth to her head.

"I didn't know you used phones, Galahad," she remarked.

"Why, yes," he replied, immediately becoming self-conscious under her amused gaze. Ordinarily he would have been that way from the start, but his nobby steel suit had made him forget his usual embarrassment in the presence of a girl. He had noticed that. "My name is Don—"

A delighted whoop of laughter cut him short. Don gazed, surprised, puzzled and a trifle resentfully at this girl who could act so.

"I might have known!" she cried, joyously. "The worthy Don himself, in person."

That sounded more familiar to his recently professional ear. Still bewildered, he nodded solemn acknowledgment of his screen connection.

"And how are all the folks in Mancha?" she inquired, smiling.

Puzzled though he was, Don was warmed by her infectious gayety. A smile was struggling to his serious countenance as he started to tell her that he was from Chugwater, when she arose and dropped him a graceful curtesy.

"Permit me to introduce myself, wild

knight," she entreated, adding: "I am hight Dulcinea del Toboso."

"I'd never have taken you for Spanish," announced the solemn knight with great seriousness, whereupon she joyously laughed again.

"Ah, *señor,* you do not recognize the Havana filler in the domestic wrapper," she reminded him. This time he laughed with her.

"You are the maid? Where's the owners?" he asked. "What happened?"

"Can't fool you," she admitted with an unexplained laugh. "My, the owners motored to the city until evening. This is Mr. Kent Ordway's country place. The—other servants are over at the country club helping decorate it for to-night's charity entertainment and costume fête. I was here alone when this fellow came to the door pretending to be a telephone inspector. Once indoors, he tried to force me to show him where Mr. Ordway's daughter keeps her pearl necklace. He'd found out that she had taken it out of the safe deposit box to wear at the affair to-night. It's quite valuable. Too bad you couldn't have rescued her instead of just me."

"You suit me," Don stated simply. "'Tisn't every girl who would fight a crook that way. I claim you're one mighty brave, faithful girl."

"Worthy of a gallant knight?" she asked, then stopped abruptly.

There was something other than banter in her tongue. Suddenly Don felt an odd, new personal interest in this girl. He was about to volunteer an explanation of his steel sports suit when she cut in with:

"What's a knight for if not to aid maids in distress? If that's your noble palfrey using our lawn for an automat, will you take me on behind and jog us down to the village, just as they did in ye olden days? I need an armored car like you. The servants took the station car, while the runabout in the garage is out of commission, and the folks have the big machine in town. There's a reason for my wanting to get there in a hurry as long as the telephone wire is cut. I only weigh a hundred and twenty, so the S.P.C.A. won't nab you for overburdening your steed. Kay-oh?"

At Don's nod she scampered upstairs. When she returned in a few minutes she had discarded her apron and cap, substituting a silken sports sweater and a jaunty knockabout hat. She held her hands behind her.

"Good Sir Knight, I fain would test your unquestioning loyalty to your ladye faire *pro tem.* That's I, aren't it?" she interrupted. "Yes? Good! Then you're supposed to kneel and take off that tin bonnet."

"It's steel and it's buckled on," apologized Don, dropping to one knee as he had seen knights pictured. He pushed back his visor.

"That's got to do then," she sighed. "Shut your eyes."

He obeyed unquestioningly. He felt her small hands reach through the helmet opening and encircle his neck with a necklace. She patted the adornment down out of sight behind his steel collar.

"There. Now you can be my armored treasure car," she announced. "There are safety vaults in the village. Let's go."

A minute later the white horse was ambling down the road in the opposite direction from which Don had come. On the steed's back were the knight and the ladye faire, riding boldly to meet robber barons or dragons.

Double burden did not stop Dobbin in his tracks. He was a stout rascal who had been accustomed to carrying men of metal, so to speak, and he challenged any of King Arthur's steeds to shake a meaner hoof.

They jogged an eighth of a mile before encountering any one. Then a disreputable-looking flivver plunged apparently out of the bushes beside the road and blocked their way. The driver was much the same type physically as the fellow Don had routed. A wiry, thin-faced chap with an old-young face deeply seamed by hard lines.

His seatmate was middle-aged and more robust. His rather florid face sported a small black mustache. Both men wore motoring caps and clothes in the extreme manner.

"Hold on there," ordered the larger man, raising a detaining hand. "Where are you taking that girl?"

"What's it to you?" countered Don.

Something about his steel suit inspired him to roar his challenge. "Who are you?"

"He's the owner of the house you just helped rob, and I'm deputy sheriff," put in the driver, flashing a badge momentarily.

"They're not," came in a tense whisper from behind Don.

"Maybe you've been fooled into it, but you're helping my maid rob my house," declared the bigger man. "She and her crook pal had a falling out when she tried to double-cross him. We got tipped off and came along in time to grab him, back here a ways. He squealed and said she was fixing to beat it with the stuff. We want her, see?"

"It's a lie," came the girl's voice, just loud enough for Don to hear. She grasped her knight's shoulders imploringly.

The men were jumping out, one on either side of their flivver, which stood squarely in Don's path. In a flash Don wheeled his white steed and went galloping back over the road he had come. He had gained a fair start before the two men could scramble back into their car to pursue. Their anger and surprise delayed their getting under way a moment.

Don's mind was bewildered by the charge and denial, still he had but one thought: To save the girl. He knew he could not escape the motor car, but he remembered having seen something beside the road back a bit.

"Jump off and hand me that, quick," he ordered, reining to a halt and pointing to a ten-foot rail which had been knocked off the fence.

Ordinarily he would not have considered touching these men with a ten-foot pole, but when one wears a Sheffield benny it seemed the knightly thing. The girl leaped to obey, and hastily helped couch one end of the rail in the lance socket. With this improvised lance presented Don charged valiantly toward the smoke-breathing dragon approaching.

They were almost upon him. Don's hope was to joust at least one of his adversaries full sore—to knock the driver from the wheel, if possible, and then to improvise.

Within him stirred strange, ancient rages which blinded him to the absurdity of his tilt. His charge threw the two men into confusion by its very unexpectedness. Their car wobbled. For an instant Don's improvised lance drove straight at the driver's chest. Then the gallant steed stumbled slightly. The temporary spear dipped.

With a rending snap the tip of the rail struck the lip of the dash just below the windshield. Jousting a man and jousting a flivver are two very different matters. The thrust-back along the rail, even as it snapped, knocked faithful Dobbin and his master for a row of round tables. Don landed heavily in the ditch with his horse lying on him as it floundered to rise. For the nonce, fight was knocked out of both of them.

Jeers floated back as the flivver buzzed on down the road and rasped to a stop. Both men piled out and made a running jump for the girl. She had waited until she had seen the debacle of Don, and then she tried to climb the fence. She had waited too long.

They seized and dragged her to the car. Her first scream was stifled by a hand being clapped hastily over her mouth. Don's last view of his ladye faire was as she was thrust to the floor in the rear while the car rattled on up the hill and disappeared over the crest.

Falling off horses was no novelty or great mishap to a rodeo rider. A bit sore, Don soothed the indignant Dobbin and drew him over to the fence, where the weighted rider could climb to the saddle. He wondered if knights of old carried Pullman ladders when they went knight riding.

At the hill crest he reined and peered over the top before riding into view. The flivver was executing a hasty left turn into a woodland lane. Looking beyond that point Don saw the reason. Coming toward them in the distance was an ambulance ahead of which bounced a country policeman on a motor cycle. Harley had put through his ambulance call.

Not knowing this, the girl's abductors were uncertain whether the policeman was answering an ambulance or a burglary summons. They took no chances, but drove into the wood. Don saw the ambulance and cop turn off in the opposite direction,

toward the scene of the recent tournament mishap.

He knew he would have to act alone or lose the trail while calling the cop. He looked for a short cut and found it. A city man would have overlooked it, but it was plain as a sign to the range rider accustomed to faint trails.

Winding through the trees were wagon tracks leading from near by diagonally toward the cross lane into which the flivver had turned. By following it, Don was sure he could short-cut to where the car had gone. True, the wagon tracks were on the opposite side of a fence. But fences were challenges to a man from the open range. Anyway, this barrier was a simple snake-fence—rough hewn rails interlaced.

Don let down a few bars and rode in. Then, urging his steed forward at top speed, he dashed recklessly along the sound-muffling woodland trail.

Before he emerged from the screen of trees he heard the chug of a running engine. Ahead he saw the now familiar flivver standing empty beside a cabin set back from the cross lane. An old shack that might be used for sheltering implements, if not a relic of Colonial days. Beyond it a few yards glinted a large pond, one of those puddles hidden in the wooded Long Island hills.

With the engine's chugging covering any sound of his stealthy approach, Don crept to the cabin and listened at a chink in the wall.

"It's all right, I tell you, Deck," the bigger man's voice was saying. "That cop wasn't after us. Him and the ambulance turned off on the other side of the big road. And that bozo in tin pants didn't chase along either. I waited down at the corner to make sure. I guess he was knocked kickin'. So this is the place you spoke about. Some dump!"

"Whadya make that bird?" asked the driver. "A nut?"

"They's a fancy dress charity doings tonight, as you oughta remember," the bigger man reminded him. "He might been rehearsing his costume."

"Fact. Takes you to dope it out, Pud," admired Deck. "Let's get busy. I been having all I could do holding this frail without trying to frisk her. Come on, kid, kick in. Ah! you would, wouldja?"

Don waited for no more. Stepping as softly as he could on the velvet turf he lumbered around to the door. Thrusting this open, he confronted the two startled motor crooks roughly handling the girl.

At sight of him both men let go of her and made for him. Don met them more than half way. With a vigorous surge he threw his metal-weighted body forward.

One mailed fist struck the smaller man, Deck, a crashing blow on the temple, knocking him into a stunned heap at the far end of the shack. Instantly Don wrapped one stovepipe-like arm around the bigger man, pinning down Pud's arm as it tried to raise a gun. At close range Don hammered down with his clenched mailed hand on the fellow's head.

"Behind you, Don!" screamed the girl, who had torn off the gag she had been forced to wear.

Her warning came too late. Don was seized from behind and tripped. Under the weight of two men and his own steel suit he crashed downward on the floor.

His two opponents fell on top of him. Although he kicked and fought vigorously, the armor which had protected him now handicapped his resistance. He was almost as helpless as a turtle on its back. The pair sitting on him tied his wrists and ankles before rolling him over. Then he stared into the evil, grinning face of the crook who had shot at him.

"Thought you were slick, huh?" he sneered triumphantly. Turning to Pud he added: "He didn't know I was back there where you left me after I tipped you the lay of things. So I shaddered him through the woods without his ever thinking to look back. How about it? Don't I get my split for this? Even if we did start after this independent, I put you wise after this bird bu'sted in. I earned my cut on this job."

"All right, if we can glom it off this frail," agreed Pud, reluctantly. He turned toward the girl. "Are you going to hand over, or do we have to tear off your fancy rags to get it? Be snappy."

The girl shrank back against the wall.

"I told you I haven't got it," she cried,

her eyes going to her knight in shining armor in a silent appeal.

"We'll see," snarled Pud, taking a step toward her.

"Let her alone. She hasn't got it," commanded Don, harshly. "No use hurting her when even dumb-bells like you will guess in time. I've got it, pinned on the front of my shirt under this breastplate."

"You got it?" exclaimed Pud. "You got what?"

"What you're looking for," asserted Don, vaguely.

"How could you?" cried the girl in reproachful despair. "Why did you give it away when they never would have suspected?"

Her tone seemed too sincere to be assumed, and her glance was one of indignant scorn for a helper who had failed in a pinch. She thought he was giving up meekly. Don wondered if, in her dismay, she had not noticed where he had said the hiding place was.

"Shall we blast or use an ax?" asked the newcomer.

"You'll have to take my coat off to get at it," sighed Don, resignedly. "Lord knows I'll be glad to be rid of this junk. You'll have to untie my wrists to slip the coat over my head and arms."

This seemed inevitable. The crooks were not versed in steel tailoring. After a moment's hesitation the two men cut his wrist bonds and ordered him to raise his arms so that they could pull off the steel coat. Don obeyed, for a second. They were tugging at him with all hands when his wiry arms suddenly clamped down around their necks.

Instantly he hugged them against his plated sides. The throats of the two crooks were caught in steel vises. There was no wielding of those metallic cylinders which incased his arms and which pinched those necks against his armored body. The crooks' eyes were popping as breath was shut off.

"Run, girl! Run back home and lock it in your wall safe," cried Don, dragging the men away from the door which they had been blocking successfully until then.

She was out and away in a flash, having caught instantly the idea which Don threw out to fool the crooks. Keep them in doubt as to where the loot was and they would not fight so enthusiastically was his strategy. Keep them guessing till they wabbled.

"Leggo them guys or I'll plug yuh," snarled a voice, Deck's.

Don looked into the unpleasant muzzle of a pistol held a few feet from the opening in his helmet. He wished his visor would drop.

Deck had recovered from the Bessemer blow Don had dealt, and now was on his feet, drawing bead on the only vulnerable spot in the human tank.

"Listen, bozo. This rod will speak if yuh don't quit sudden," warned Deck. "I oughta plug yuh anyways for that wallop. I can get you through that window in your hat, so be sudden."

As Don relaxed his grip before the menace of that weapon his two prisoners wrenched themselves away. Immediately they seized his arms. Being still tied around the ankles Don was at a disadvantage in resisting. Before he realized their intentions his three enemies had thrown him on his back and were dragging him along by his feet. His smooth steel back made a sort of sled.

"We gotta catch that girl. She's got it," yammered Deck. "Heave this guy into the lake. It's got a quagmire bottom that'll hold him and his diving suit like glue. I nearly got caught in the mud yesterday when I tried wading after locating this place. It'll hide the body, too. A shot might be heard by somebody. In he goes!"

Don had been hauled unceremoniously to the edge of the pond while Deck made this wrathful suggestion. With a "yo-heave!" they threw him bodily into the water. There he sank from sight under the weight of his metal. Pausing only long enough to enjoy the splash, the three crooks ran to their car and dashed back toward the highway in pursuit of the girl.

Strangling and nearly bursting, Don Kimball managed to thrust his nose above the surface. He had hit the pond on his back and the blow had knocked the wind out of him. Water filled his nose, mouth and the space between his body and his armor. He might have resembled a sub-

marine, but he felt and navigated like a sunken dreadnaught.

Beneath him the soft, treacherous mud yielded and then closed on him, holding his body in its sticky grip. Above him lay three feet of water. By bracing his hands on the yielding, muddy bottom and pressing downward he was able to raise his nose until it reached air. However, this advantage could not last long.

Yielding mud beneath him warned that he was sinking. His hands, upon which he had raised the upper part of his body, were slipping deeper into the mire, slowly, but surely. Each move he made with his legs only plunged him farther into this prison of mud.

Every attempt to turn over and rise was impeded by the sticky mass and the weight of water and steel. Once more the water was at his nostrils as his nose sank to the level of the pond's surface. The bog was swallowing him.

Above the sound of his desperate struggles he heard splashing. A rope fell across his face. Instinctively Don grasped it, wrenching his hands out of the mud and immediately submerging completely. He clung to the rope, wrapping it around his metalled arm and anchoring it in his steely grip.

The rope tautened. It seemed as though his arms would be torn from their sockets, for his spurs anchored him. In a supreme effort he raised his ponderous feet from their miry grips as he skidded slowly along on the slimy pond bottom. It seemed as though his lungs would burst with the effort of holding his breath as he was towed out into the air and sunlight.

Hitched to the other end of the rope was faithful Dobbin, and the girl Dulcinea was driving. She assisted the exhausted knight out of the shallows.

Bewildered at seeing her there, Don sputtered his questions. She was quite matter-of-fact, explaining that she had pretended to run away down the lane, but had merely dodged into the thick shrubbery. Hidden there she had watched the crooks throw Don into the pond and leave.

"And you risked more danger to save me!" he exclaimed.

"You didn't suppose I would desert—my knight, did you?" she smiled. "After all the chivalry you've shown to-day for me—a poor maid in distress."

"You're just the girl I've been looking for," blurted out Sir Don, Knight. That armor was getting under his skin.

"Why! what do you mean?" she exclaimed, with a wonderful portrayal of surprise. As if she didn't know, the minx!

"Just that," announced Don from within the shelter of his perambulating fort. He was beginning to understand how King Arthur's table companions got that way, also how the steel corporation wins. "You're dandy and brave, and you'd stick to a man like—like—"

"Like that mud," she laughed, pointing to the mire that caked his armor. "Oh, you wild knights! Bestowing your favors on a poor serving maid. You don't know me, and you don't know but what that man told the truth about my stealing and double-crossing."

"I know you by looking at you. You'd never steal or double-cross," declared Don, stubbornly. "And I don't care if you are a maid, you're the woman for me. I've got a good ranch out in Wyoming. I'm just riding here for the adventure. Out there we'd appreciate your qualities as a real woman."

"I might even be governor, eh?" she smiled. Then suddenly, without warning, her head was pillowed on his plate steel front, and her arms were trying to find a comfortable hugging place. Whimsically, she murmured: "If you mean that, you must let me pick your suits after this."

"Wish this old junk was off me," grumbled Don, patting her with Gary caresses. "We'd better trail along to see that that gang doesn't wreck your boss's place."

Again the white horse ambled along with two riders. At the intersection of the lane and the main highway Don pointed toward Judson's field and said:

"You take my horse and ride over there. Unless they've gone, you'll find a motion picture unit and motorcycle cop. Tell him to hustle down to that Ordway house. I'll trot there and if those crooks are around I'll try to detain 'em until help arrives."

"Don't take unnecessary risks," she urged, and galloped away.

As fast as he could go in his heavy summer steel, Don ran the opposite way to the Ordway house. Beneath his attempted stealthy tread the broken glass tinkled as he entered by the door he had crashed earlier.

All was quiet within, ominously quiet. He paused, listening. Then three large, businesslike revolvers were poked from behind the heavy velvet portières, and a deep voice ordered:

"Stick 'em up."

His ponderous arms upraised, the knight stared while two policemen and a prosperous-looking citizen with graying hair stepped out, presenting revolvers for Don's approval.

"This fits the description telephoned us by the man who saw this bird break in before," began one policeman, addressing the plain citizen. "Lucky you drove by from the club just as he were starting here. My idea of putting the car out of sight and hiding here wasn't so bad. But the nerve of him, coming back! I don't get it, unless he came back for something he left. And in that get-up that any one could spot."

"It disguises him completely, though, and maybe he thought he would be taken for one of our guests for to-night's costume fête," replied the man of the house. To Don he added: "What's your excuse, crashing in?"

"I had to—the door was locked," explained Don. "A yegg was beating up your maid—"

"Bunk! Our maid has been helping decorate at the clubhouse all afternoon," snapped Ordway. "She was there fifteen minutes ago when I dropped Mrs. Ordway there. What nonsense is this?"

"I mean the other maid—Dulcinea," floundered Don. "She had to get something valuable away from here to a safe place, I guess. So I took her on my horse. We had a ruckus or two with some rival crooks that were after it, but she got it away safely—"

"Got it away? The Ordway pearl necklace!" exclaimed the owner. "If you aren't in on this, some clever female crook has used you."

"Hold on there, mister," cried Don, wrathfully, taking a clanking step forward before the policemen could seize him.

"Let's have a look at this bird without the kettle on," growled one officer, releasing the snaps and lifting the helmet. The quick uncovering disclosed Don's tanned and temporarily-troubled face. Long jaw, straight brows, serious eyes and mouth, and erect, muscular neck, around which—

"The pearls!" shouted Ordway, pointing at Don's costly necklace. "No wonder he tried to defend this female crook—"

"Don't you talk thataway," roared Don. "I know a good girl when I meet one, and Dulcy's one."

"Thanks for the testimonial," cried the girl, stepping in, followed by the motorcycle cop and the movie man. She went to Don's side and faced the gaping Ordway, saying: "I'm surprised you didn't recognize my description. You forgot I'm going to the fête as a maid for a night."

"What did he call you?" demanded Ordway. "And who is he?"

"You may be pardoned for not recognizing me, but every one should know him," laughed the girl, a bit proudly as she entwined one of Don's stovepipe sleeves with both of her arms. "I am merely Dulcinea del Toboso. While this gentleman, who has asked me to share his ranch in Wyoming—and I'm tempted—you needn't scowl, revered dad!—this is none other than the renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha. Don, what *is* our name?"

THE END

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TAKE A CHANCE

on the Complete Novelette of this title

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next week and you won't regret it.

The Gleaming Blade

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Four Goliaths," "Soft Money," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

IF the death of Meadows had caused a sensation in the city, the announcement of the discovery of the body of Doolittle, buried under the stage of the opera house, threw the place into a frenzy of excitement.

On one side there was a movement against actors in general; the element which belonged to churches that have always opposed the stage got up in arms, so to speak. They were aided and abetted, *sub-rosa*, by the proprietors of two picture theaters whose business was being injured by the recent prosperity of the spoken stage.

Mrs. Davis, the boarding house keeper who had expelled Miss Willow and Mr. Gray from her home because she was afraid they might murder her in her bed, was congratulated on all sides for her foresight and sagacity. Although the entire theatrical company, with the exception of Howard Wheelock, were released from custody the first thing in the morning, it seemed evident that the Merry Hills Stock Company was doomed, so far as local patronage was concerned. Threats were heard on Main Street to bombard the actors with vegetables and eggs if they dared to give further performances on the stage beneath which one of them had buried another whom he had treacherously murdered.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 12.

When it was learned that Wheelock was held in jail, charged with the double murder, a movement started to lynch him out of hand. The local barber, who was the first to mention Colonel Lynch by name, found many who agreed with him that it was the thing to do, but the mob spirit died out for lack of a peerless leader.

However, the actors hardly dared go out into the street; they were recipients of hard looks and biting remarks. Willingly they would have jumped their contracts and escaped to New York, but they were released only on condition that they would remain in town within reach of the authorities if required.

Harrison Gray was very bitter at their enforced detention, and he found an adherent in Fay Winsor. She paid him gratifying attention when he fumed to Mrs. Meadows and Miss Heathington in the ladies' parlor of the hotel, and declared her anxiety to leave town at the earliest possible moment.

"I thought you were rather interested in Wheelock," he said to her in a low tone.

"Not in any way except professionally," she assured him. "I liked him as a comrade in the theater, but there was no sentiment between us. I am rather a decided individual myself, and poor Howard seems rather helpless."

"Hardly the way to describe a man who appears to have killed two persons."

"Of course the evidence points strongly to him," she admitted, "but I find it hard to credit it. Don't you?"

"I don't know," said Gray hesitatingly. "I gave him a helping hand when he first came here, and when you seemed such a friend of his I naturally continued to do what I could for him. But he had a hard streak in him. I sincerely hope that he proves his innocence."

"So do I," she said rather indifferently. "Personally, I am so overcome by these horrible crimes and so fed up on this dreadful town that I would walk back to New York, if necessary. If I wasn't at the end of my rope financially I never should have come here."

"But you brought your uncle down here to defend him."

"And myself. You forget there was some suspicion directed toward me as regards the first murder. Naturally, I asked my uncle to look after Mr. Wheelock under the circumstances. But I never would take financial help from any of my family. I declared my independence much too loudly."

"I trust you would not hesitate to take monetary assistance from a fellow trouper, even if you would not gratify your family by appealing for aid."

"Am I to understand that you are offering to loan me money?"

"I wouldn't presume, but I would like you to know I am at your service."

"But you are as broke as the rest of us," she said bluntly.

"I was, but I am about to receive some funds from an unexpected source."

"Didn't I hear you say that you were behind in your wife's alimony?"

"No, you didn't hear me say that," he said, rather exasperated. "I presume you got the information from Wheelock, and I don't thank him for telling you. It was true some weeks ago."

"I see," she said. "Have you any idea how we can escape from this town?"

"The trouble is that we can be held without bail as material witnesses in the trial of Wheelock; it's rather unusual courtesy that we are at large, but I am hoping they will soon get enough evidence against him so that they will not need us. The company is broken up for good, we are spending our own money while we stay here, and some of us have very little."

"And the worst of it is that we must live at the hotel," broke in Mrs. Caruther, the character woman, who had heard the last remark. "I tried several boarding places, but nobody would take me in. I suppose they think a poor old woman like myself might kill them in their sleep."

"That's why Mrs. Davis put me out," laughed Fay. "It doesn't take much to turn ordinary folks against the acting profession."

"Actors have always been outcasts," said Gray. "In the days of the Greeks and Romans they were slaves, and overseers stood in the wings with whips to beat them

if they didn't get applause. After the greatest actors in the Roman dramas finished their big speeches they would stretch out their hands to the audience to plead for applause, knowing that they would be beaten if it did not come."

"How terrible! I never heard that," breathed Mrs. Caruther.

"The cringing gesture persists to this day among acrobats," he continued. "You know how they step to the footlights and beg for handclaps in their dumb way."

"I always knew acrobats were dumb," smiled Fay. "But I did suppose they had heard of the fall of the Roman Empire."

"In the Middle Ages it was such a contemptible profession that none but the lowest women would embrace it, which led to laws prohibiting women from appearing on the stage. In Elizabethan days women's rôles were played by boys—in fact, nearly all Shakespeare's great women were created by male performers."

"I can see that we have no right to complain if Merry Hills ostracizes us," the girl said. "After all, the profession has come a long way in the last hundred years. But, Mr. Gray, it seems to me that you have an unusual education. You have never told us anything about yourself. Are you a college man?"

"I was born in England," he said, "and I got my education at Eton. Had it not been for family reverses I should have gone to Oxford or Cambridge."

"I never would have taken you for an Englishman. You have absolutely no accent."

"I have been playing in this country for fifteen years, and got it rubbed off."

"Were you on the stage in England?"

"Well, not on the legitimate stage. I did a few turns in variety. Those were the days of my youth. I have forgotten them."

"Harrison Gray is rather an American combination of names."

"Oh, it's not my real name. I assumed it over here in my early days of one-night stands. I say, let's you and I go for a walk. This hotel is most depressing."

"I don't mind. Wait till I can put on a hat."

In her room she tried on two or three hats before deciding which she should wear, and then she studied herself in the mirror, tried on a few facial expressions, smiled a little, and went down to meet the actor.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CASE AGAINST WHEELOCK.

LEST the reader assume that the girl who may be considered the heroine of this narrative was rather fickle, and was betraying an astonishing callousness toward the young man with whom she had been allowing herself occasional sentimental passages, let us say that she had tried very hard to see Howard that morning when she had been released herself, but found the authorities determined that he should remain *incommunicado*. They would not even deliver to him a message which she scratched upon a card, since both Ferguson and the chief of police had come to the conclusion that he was a killer, double-dyed.

Francis Winsor had gone to New York the previous day, but would arrive back in the afternoon. In view of the evidence there was no doubt whatever that Wheelock would be held for the grand jury and tried for his life. Howard had been left ignorant of the discovery of the pocketbook and weapon which had been found under the floor of his dressing room. He had been placed in a cell at a distance from the other performers and did not even know that they had been set free.

Ferguson was busy getting a record of his movements the previous day, and not having much luck.

According to the detective's theory, Doolittle had been killed after the performance two nights before. The manager had remained in the theater after the performers departed. He had told the doorkeeper that he might go home and that he would lock the stage door with his own key. When all was quiet he had descended into the pit under the stage to look for the hidden treasure. Wheelock must have been in the house also, to have followed him down under the stage and killed him within an hour of the end of the performance.

There was this difficulty which required explanation. Wheelock was not a member of the company at the time, and he was not occupying the dressing room of the leading man. Why had he hidden the weapon and the pocketbook in that dressing room?

Ferguson got around this by assuming that Wheelock knew he would be called in to take Doolittle's place. The money taken from the cache was bulky and he did not dare to emerge from the theater late at night with such incriminating trinkets as the knife and the pocketbook. Having formerly occupied the dressing room of the leading man, he knew about the loose board in the floor. What better hiding place could he find in a hurry?

Would it not have been better to have left the knife and the pocketbook on the person of the dead man? Perhaps, but even the most cold-blooded murderer would be a little flustered after his crime and might do things that would incriminate him. If criminals were always logical and clear-headed, very few of them would ever be caught.

The first snag encountered by the detective was the statement by Banks, the hotel clerk, that Wheelock did not attend the performance that night, but had spent most of the evening in the hotel lobby reading a magazine. And the clerk said he saw him after the performance in conversation with Miss Willow in the ladies' parlor. They had emerged at midnight, taken their respective room keys, and ascended to their rooms.

Early in the morning Ferguson had talked with Franklin, the electrician who had bolted through a window when Ferguson placed the entire personnel of the stock company under arrest.

Franklin had given himself up after a night of consideration, and explained that he was frightened because he had pointed out the trapdoor to the detective and was afraid that he would be charged with the crime for that reason.

He had told his wife everything when he got home, she had upbraided him for his idiotic conduct and ordered him to seek out the detective and explain his behavior. Ferguson had ordered him locked up for the time being, but anticipated no important results from him.

The same morning he had given an interview to a waitress at the hotel who established a perfect alibi for Green, the original suspect in the Meadows case. The girl was obviously telling the truth, was hero worshiping Green for his silence, and the detective knew that the former stage hand would have to be released. This did not worry him, because he was sure that the same man had killed both Meadows and Doolittle, and as Green was in jail when Doolittle had been slain he was unquestionably innocent.

But the evidence that he obtained from Banks and Miss Willow, or Winsor, as he knew her now, made it hard to place Wheelock in a position where he could have killed Doolittle at the time when the officer thought the murder must have been committed. Perhaps Doolittle had returned to the hotel from the theater and gone back again in the small hours of the morning. In that case Wheelock might have slipped out of his room and followed him.

If he could find a townsman who had seen either or both going toward the opera house at such a time, it would greatly help the prosecution. In a town like Merry Hills there isn't a soul stirring at one or two in the morning; it was possible that both men could have walked from the hotel to the theater without being sighted by anybody, not even by one of the very few policemen on duty late at night.

Had Ferguson been trying to construct a defense for Wheelock, instead of a conviction, he might have given some consideration to the possibility of another member of the company, Gray or Franklyn Blythe, the character man, or one of the stage hands, committing the crime, since they might have slipped into the dressing room of the leading man and deliberately planted the incriminating evidence under the loose board.

He did realize such a possibility, but he was firmly of the opinion that whoever killed Doolittle had killed Meadows, and he had investigated these men to find that they had perfect alibis on the night that Mead-

ows was killed. Wheelock had been in a position to murder Meadows; ergo, he had done so, and also killed Doolittle.

However, a hard day's work left him where he had been the night before. His only evidence against Wheelock was the knife and the pocketbook which he found hidden in the dressing room that the actor had occupied when he was placed under arrest.

With Winsor defending Wheelock, Ferguson knew better than try any rough third degree methods on the young man. He took a course often taken by policemen who are in a quandary; he deliberately set to work to crystallize public opinion against Wheelock so that he would have no difficulty in getting an indictment by the grand jury. This was fairly simple, for the town was full of reporters, and the prosecution had issued no statement up to the present time.

The second murder in the stock company had caused the New York City editors to go mad. There were not only six or eight reporters but several women writers on the job, and the battery of photographers increased in size every hour.

Late in the afternoon he told one of the reporters that he would give them some information at six o'clock, and he had a full attendance in his room at that hour.

"I think you are entitled to some information on this case, gentlemen," he announced, "since you have been sent here by your newspapers, and, while I would not give out any information which might injure the cause of justice, I think enough progress has been made to give you a statement."

There was an anticipatory buzz, notebooks were produced, and alertness was in order.

"I have placed Howard Wheelock, the leading man of the Merry Hills Stock Company, under arrest, and will present evidence to the grand jury which will secure his indictment for murder, in my opinion. I believe he killed both Meadows and Doolittle. The object was robbery."

He paused to watch the effect, and it was satisfactory.

"Wheelock was the last person to see Meadows alive, according to his own statement. This was at midnight on Saturday night. He went to his apartment, was upstairs some ten minutes, was seen leaving the hotel. Next morning Meadows was discovered dead, and the medical officer stated that he had been dead from eight to twelve hours. No other person, so far as has been discovered, entered Meadows's room after Wheelock left until a chambermaid discovered the murder about 10 A.M. I have evidence that Meadows had a considerable sum of money in his room, which was gone in the morning.

"Wheelock knew that Meadows had more money hidden somewhere in the theater. Doolittle, who came from New York on Monday morning, also knew this. Doolittle went to the theater some time after midnight on Wednesday night to search for this money. Wheelock followed him, descended after him into the pit under the stage, saw him locate the hidden funds, killed him, took the money from his person and made good his escape. He killed both men with a knife. Meadows he struck in the breast, Doolittle in the back. In each case the thrust was sure and penetrated the heart."

"Whew!" exclaimed the reporter of the New York *Sphere*. "That's a whale of a charge you are bringing, Mr. Ferguson. "What's your evidence?"

"You know better than to ask that," retorted the detective. "I will present my evidence to the proper authorities. I have given you all the information I have a right to give you. In my opinion it is a very clear case."

"But how about this leading woman, Miss Fay Winsor, who went under the name of Helen Willow down here?" persisted the reporter. "Is she an accessory? Didn't she visit Meadows in his rooms just before he was murdered?"

"I make no charge against Miss Willow. She did visit Meadows on business Saturday night, but Wheelock saw him afterward. He testified that Meadows was alone and alive; hence the young woman did not kill him.

"We know that he was alive at midnight, and at midnight she arrived at her

boarding place nearly half a mile away, according to a witness at that place."

"That's too bad," said one of the reporters. "A woman in a murder case makes it more interesting. Did Wheelock kill Meadows because of jealousy as well as for purposes of robbery?"

"I can give you no more information. You'll have to do the best you can."

Some of the reporters were edging toward the door. There would be a stempede for telephones and the telegraph office."

"Snappy work, Mr. Ferguson," said the *Sphere* man. "I'm much obliged for the information, and the papers won't forget to give you credit."

"Pooh!" said Ferguson. "What do I care about that?"

But he did care. Detectives always like to get credit in newspapers.

CHAPTER XXII.

FAY SITS IN THE GAME.

A PSYCHOLOGIST could probably write a volume on the mental attitude of a chap like Howard Wheelock, who had never even struck a man in the nose, whose disposition was dignifiedly pacific, and who found himself in jail, charged, not with one horrible murder, but two, the second with exceedingly brutal circumstances surrounding it, and who knew that an energetic and fairly intelligent detective was working like a Trojan to send him to the electric chair.

However, his attitude can be fairly well expressed in one word—bewilderment. Wheelock was numb with bewilderment. He wasn't scared, for he knew perfectly well that he hadn't killed anybody, and in this great and glorious country an innocent man can never be executed. Never? Well, hardly ever, as the late W. S. Gilbert once expressed a rather different state of affairs.

He didn't like being in jail; there was nothing to do. The guard informed him that he would soon be transferred to the county jail, where there was less to do. Nobody would give him any information about his crimes; he could not get his jailers to converse with him much of any. He asked to see the chief of police, and was told it was impossible, and then he demanded an interview with Ferguson and was notified that he was too busy getting evidence to see him.

He fumed a considerable amount at the incredible stupidity of the police in tangling him up with the second crime; he admitted to himself they might be justified in suspecting him of the first. He wished he could talk with Fay; wanted to write her a letter, but he knew they would read it, so he could not say any of the things he had in his mind. He tried to figure out for his own satisfaction who could have committed the double murder, but he eliminated everybody in the company, one after another, until no one was left. And he was not aware of the developments at the theater after his arrest.

About six thirty Francis Winsor arrived in town, and encountered Ferguson in the hotel lobby just after his interview with the newspaper men.

"What's all this nonsense about holding Wheelock for the second murder?" he demanded. "Can't you find anybody else to pin things onto except that poor kid?"

"I've got enough on Wheelock now to hang him twice," said the detective. "I've played square with you, Mr. Winsor, and as a result of letting that fellow out of jail Monday I've got a second killing on my hands. From now on he stays in jail till he's convicted. When you know what the evidence is you'll refuse to defend him."

"Rubbish. Can't you read character at all? You could prove to me that black was white before you would make me think that boy murdered a man, let alone two men."

"He'll go to the chair," said the detective gravely.

"I'll bet you a hundred dollars to ten he doesn't."

"It's a sure thing, but I'll not bet on it."

"You Scotchmen are all alike. You remind me of the fellow who visited Glasgow. He walked up one street and down another and didn't see a soul moving about. Finally he went back to his hotel and said to the clerk: 'I always understood that Glasgow was a bustling, busy city, streets full of

people, but it isn't Sunday, and I've been around town without meeting a single person.'

"'Man, do ye no ken?' asked the clerk. 'It's Tag Day.'"

"You make me tired," said Ferguson. "This tag stuff is an awful nuisance anyway."

Winsor laughed long and loud and Ferguson finally joined him.

"It is kind of funny," he admitted, "but I won't bet because it's against my principles, not because I'm tight. I'll tell you what I've got on Wheelock. There are many criminal lawyers I wouldn't let in on the State's case, but you are different. If you can show me that the boy isn't guilty I'll be the first to give three cheers, but the only way you can do that is to prove to me who did the killing."

He then told the lawyer everything already learned, with his own deductions.

"What's your opinion?" he demanded when he had finished.

"I don't blame you for holding him, but you can never convict him on what you have; it's too purely circumstantial. You haven't established sufficient motive, you have no evidence that he secured any money either from Meadows or Doolittle.

"If you allege jealousy as the motive for the first crime, you have none for the second, since Doolittle and Miss Winsor had nothing in common to arouse the jealousy of the boy against the actor.

"You are a long way from establishing that Wheelock visited the theater Wednesday night and followed Doolittle down into the cellar; on the contrary he has a pretty good alibi as regards the second murder."

"How about killing Doolittle to get back his own job as well as to get possession of the money hidden in the pit?"

"If he got the money what did he do with it? You've had him watched, he hasn't left town, you've gone through his room and his dressing room. As regards the stuff under the floor, somebody who wished to throw suspicion on him might have hidden it there."

"I know I haven't got all the evidence I need, but I am going to get it. What you say about somebody trying to throw suspicion on him is plausible, but remember this fellow was close to both murders. We know he could have killed Meadows, no alibi there, and we haven't found anybody else who could have got at the old man Saturday night. Don't you agree with me that both crimes were committed by the same man?"

"It seems like it, though the second murderer might have deliberately copied the method of the first to make you take that view."

"Too far-fetched."

"Possible. Now I've been paying big money to a firm of detectives in New York to look up the records of the people in this company. You have jailed the only man with a spotless record. Will you be surprised if I tell you that Franklin Blythe was tried for killing his wife in Toronto fifteen years ago, and got off because the jury disagreed? And that the weapon he was alleged to have used was a knife?"

The detective registered surprise.

"Is that so? You are sure of your facts?"

"Absolutely. I have the court records."

"Well, this needs looking into, though he seems to have a cast iron alibi as regards Meadows. He went home immediately after the theater Saturday night and played cards with Miss Heathington and his landlady, Mrs. Preble, until nearly two o'clock."

"And Harrison Gray isn't exactly spotless, though I have no murder charge to bring up against him. The detectives don't know anything about him before he landed in the United States from England some fifteen years ago, but he has been divorced by two wives for cruel and abusive treatment, been expelled from a New York theatrical club for conduct unbecoming a gentleman, and he certainly looks more like a criminal than Wheelock."

"Both Wheelock and your own niece alibi him Saturday night."

"Yes, I know that. But I am sure we are not at the bottom of this mystery yet."

"The New York underworld is full of men with criminal records who are capable of committing these two crimes, who would have killed both men for ten per cent of the money involved," said the detective

with wisdom. "But we know they are innocent because they didn't have the opportunity. There is a first time for everything and these may be the first murders Wheelock ever committed. However, if you can shake the alibis these two fellows have established you can depend upon me to work with you. I don't want to have an innocent man executed any more than you do. In the meantime I intend to have Wheelock indicted."

"Go ahead. You've got evidence enough for that. Have you seen anything of my niece?"

Ferguson grinned, a dry grin.

"She was out walking with one of your bad characters this afternoon. You had better tell her what you know about Gray. She was hanging onto his arm and looking up in his face as though he was wonderful."

"I shall tell her. A twice-divorced man is not fit company for a girl of her type."

"I never heard of a woman yet who disliked a man because he was cruel and abusive toward other women. They love a sheik."

"Will you have dinner with me at this horrible hotel?"

"I've eaten at worse, but I promised to dine at the chief's house to-night. His wife is a better cook than he is a policeman."

"After dinner can I see my client?"

"Oh, sure. I'll tell the chief. And I'll try to fix it for you to get a dinner invitation from his wife. If you are going to be in this town long you must protect your digestion."

They laughed and separated. After all, neither of them was in danger of being executed for a double murder.

Winsor was finishing dinner in the hotel dining room when Fay came in with Gray. Evidently they had been for a long walk, as her face was flushed and her eyes were bright, despite the sharpness of the weather. She spied her uncle, excused herself to Gray who found a solitary seat, and rushed over to him.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came, uncle. Things are a thousand times worse than they were before, and poor Howard is suspected of the murder of Doolittle as well as Meadows. He's in jail now. Please get him out at once."

"Sit down, dear. I would like to oblige you, but there is a limit to my powers. I am afraid Howard will have to stay in jail for some time. The police magistrate will commit him for a Grand Jury hearing tomorrow and the Grand Jury is sure to indict him."

"Oh," she wailed. "Is it as bad as that?"

"There is a great difference between an indictment and a conviction. His trial may not take place for a couple of months, and in that time we may be able to discover the real murderer."

"But how unfair to keep him in jail when he is innocent. Can't you get him out on bail?"

"No bail is possible for a man indicted for murder."

Her face fell and her big eyes filled with tears. "But this is terrible."

"Tell me, Fay, just how much are you interested in this young man? Are you in love with him?"

Her eyes fell. Though she was a big girl, she could make herself seem very little and childish at times. "I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised. I seem to be more like his mother than anything else, but I suppose that is a form of love."

"Have you ever talked of love with him? Has he proposed to you?"

She smiled rather whimsically and wistfully.

"I can't say that he has given me any verbal encouragement, but his willingness to go to jail last Sunday to get me out is pretty good evidence that he doesn't hate me. I think I can get him, if I try."

"I am undertaking his case on one condition," he said severely. "You must have no understanding with him until he is cleared. I cannot have my niece engaged to a condemned murderer."

"But if he is convicted he will need me all the more."

"It is the only condition under which I will agree to act for him. This case will cost me much money, for my time is very valuable. I have already gone to consider-

able personal expense in having investigations made, and I shall spend much more. He has no money for his defense."

"I'm so sure you will get him off that I agree," she said.

"Shake hands on it."

She thrust her long, slim, white hand across the table and he gripped it in his big one.

"Now there is another matter. Ferguson tells me that you have been going about with Gray. I don't think he is a fit companion for you. He has been divorced by two wives."

"Oh, you have a report on him. What does it say?"

"Merely what I have told you. They traced him back fifteen years when he came here from England. They haven't been able to get any further. Gray is an assumed name, but they couldn't discover his real name."

"Then I can tell you. It is Harry Temple. He comes of a good Lancashire family. He graduated from Eton and he was in variety in England before coming to this country."

"How did you learn this?" he asked in surprise.

"I've been spending time with him," she smiled.

"I see. You have turned detective."

"In a way. And how much do you know of the Doolittle case?"

"Everything, unless Ferguson held out something on me."

He explained to her what he had learned and she listened intently and understandingly.

"If you remember the plot I gave you, proving that Doolittle killed Meadows, I figured it out that he learned that there was a cache in the theater and he came back to discover it and steal the money."

"You did, sure enough, and you were right, but Doolittle did not kill himself."

"No, somebody killed him, but if I was right in one thing, why not in another?"

"Principally because I have learned beyond the shadow of a doubt that he attended the Gaiety Theater on Saturday night and after the performance went around behind, picked up Vincent Smith, who is in the cast, and went with him to a party."

"Oh, then that settles that, doesn't it?"

"I'm afraid so, Fay."

She bent her brows. "Then that makes it probable that either Howard or Blythe or Gray killed both men. We know Howard didn't do it, so that leaves the other two. Blythe is an old fuddyduddy without the courage of a mouse, and that leaves Gray."

"Your old fuddyduddy was tried for the murder of his wife some fifteen years ago and was acquitted only on a jury's disagreement."

"Just the same, I think it was Gray."

"Thinking doesn't make fact. You have got to have evidence."

"I'll get it. His weakness is thinking women fall in love with him, and he thinks I am falling for him hard just now."

"Here now, Fay. If the man is a double murderer I can't have you take any risks running around with him."

"I'm perfectly safe. He will be as nice as pie while he thinks I am falling under the influence of his fatal fascination. If your detectives will look up his career in England under the name of Harry Temple they may find something valuable, and in the meantime I'll gain his confidence. I have found out already that he is in funds, though he ought to be broke like the rest of us poor actors."

"It's dangerous business, my dear girl. If he should suspect your motive he might turn on you. A man who has killed two might just as well make it three or a dozen; the penalty is the same."

"Pooh, I'm not afraid!"

The object of this conversation sat about thirty feet away with his back turned to them. He ate heartily and with a certain amount of self-satisfaction. When he had finished he left the room, throwing a killing smile at Fay, who gave him a radiant one. Winsor nearly choked over his cup of black coffee.

"I'll have English detectives at work on him in the morning," the lawyer said. "I don't think I shall confide our suspicions to Ferguson until we have more to go on. He has rather a single track mind and at

present it is devoted to getting the goods on your young friend.

"I am a great believer in what is written on the face. Your friend Gray is genial, but he has the face of a man capable of violence. Wheelock strikes me as the opposite. But Ferguson follows evidence and takes no stock in character reading. Perhaps that is why he is not a great detective."

"When can I see Howard."

"I'll see him myself to-night and try to arrange with Ferguson to let you call on him to-morrow. They will station some one to overhear your conversation, so confine it to good wishes."

When Winsor told him that an indictment was certain and that in all probability he would be placed on trial for his life, Howard Wheelock realized for the first time the full horror of his position.

"How can they accuse me of such things?" he demanded. "You know I didn't kill either of those men, don't you, Mr. Winsor?"

"If I didn't believe you innocent I wouldn't defend you, my boy. Through no fault of your own you are caught in a mesh of circumstances and you are going through an ordeal. I want you to know that I will leave no stone unturned to prove your innocence, and unless Ferguson gets more direct evidence than he has at present, he cannot secure a conviction with me on the defense. I know a dozen ways to puncture his case.

"Since you had nothing to do with these crimes he is fortunate to have found any evidence against you, and I doubt if he uncovers anything else. I want to ask you one question: Did anybody come into your dressing room to your knowledge during the performance last evening?"

"I don't know. Yes, Miss Heathington smoked a cigarette with me. Miss Winsor came in for a moment. Gray and Blythe were in, and Mrs. Meadows also entered during the third act."

"Humph. The whole company were in."

"Why do you ask?"

"Because somebody hid Doolittle's pocketbook and the knife with which he was killed under a loose board in the floor."

This was the first that Howard knew of the cause of his arrest, and he naturally exclaimed, and demanded more details, which Winsor gave him in full.

"I tripped over that board early in the evening," he said. "I nearly fell and I asked Mrs. Meadows who was standing near to have it fixed. She came in to look at it; that was what brought her into the room."

"Mrs. Meadows!"

"Yes. She was the boss, of course, and it was up to her."

"I see. Were any of the actors in hearing when you had this discussion over the loose board?"

"I really did not notice."

"Who do you think killed the two men, Wheelock?"

"It is a complete mystery to me, but it looks as though some member of the company must have done it. I certainly hate to think that anybody with whom I have had such pleasant associations could have committed such ghastly crimes."

"How about Gray? Would you suspect him?"

"Least of all. He couldn't have killed Meadows because he was in bed at Mrs. Davis's boarding house when the murder took place. I know that."

"Did you see anything of Blythe on Saturday night when you were hanging around the hotel waiting for Fay."

"No. I didn't."

"Well, he was playing cards with Miss Heathington and his landlady half a mile away, from eleven thirty until two o'clock. If he is out and Gray is out you must have done the job, since you are sure a member of the company did it."

"I know darn well it wasn't I."

"That was rather an ingenious piece of fiction you wrote about Mrs. Meadows killing her husband. Do you suppose she could also have slain Doolittle?"

"I didn't believe Mrs. Meadows killed her husband. It was a game I was playing with Fay. You remember that she wrote an even more ingenious story proving that Doolittle had done it."

"Some of the most brutal crimes in history were perpetrated by women. If you,

Gray and Blythe are out, there are left Fay, Heathington, Mrs. Caruthers and Mrs. Meadows. Fay and Heathington seem to be eliminated, we know that Fay is innocent and Heathington has as good an alibi for Saturday night as Blythe. That leaves Mrs. Meadows and Mrs. Caruther. The former is by far the more forceful character."

"Oh, she couldn't have done it."

Then we are back to Gray and Blythe against whom there isn't a scrap of evidence and apparently perfect alibis, and you who certainly could have killed Meadows and might have killed Doolittle. No wonder Ferguson is convinced you are guilty. If I didn't know you, I might feel the same way."

"I suppose a jury will look at it exactly as he does."

"Don't you worry about the jury yet, my boy. We'll find the real culprit and have you out of here in a week or two. In the meantime we are working for you. Fay wants to see you, and I have arranged for her to come to-morrow about noon for ten minutes only. You will be arraigned before the local police magistrate who will have you sent to the county jail to await action by the Grand Jury first thing in the morning, and they will probably move you in the afternoon."

"Where is the county jail?"

"At Beaufortown, fifteen miles away, an easy hour's auto ride from here and much more convenient for me to run down from New York to see you."

"Well, I'll try to make the best of things."

"Good boy. I'm going now. Try to get some sleep."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GRAY SQUIRREL.

As Winsor had predicted, Wheelock was taken before the police judge at ten next morning and, since his counsel had offered no objection, he was committed to the county jail to await action by the Grand Jury on the charge of murder in the first degree of Meadows and Doolittle.

No evidence was offered, the whole affair a formality, but the court room was filled with curious people, reporters feverishly wrote word-pictures of him, sob sisters told how young and pitiful he looked and photographers snapped him in a business-like way, as he emerged from the court-room in charge of the officers.

It was an experience which Wheelock hated, he tasted the dregs of humiliation during that short session, which was merely a foretaste of what would occur at the trial. One of the weaknesses of our system of justice is the grave injustice done innocent persons charged with crimes, who go through all the horror of a trial, suffer confinement for months, and then are released because they have proved their innocence, uncompensated for their suffering.

If the State were liable to heavy damages for trying persons whom it could not convict, it is possible that a few guilty would escape, but it is certain that the outrage of dragging the innocent into court because the authorities must try somebody for a heinous crime, would occur less often. The Oriental custom of cutting off the head of the wrongful accuser has its merits.

Shortly after his return to the town jail, Fay was admitted to his cell. A prison official followed her in and remained in the cell to note their conversation, which caused a perfectly natural embarrassment on both sides. Their eyes spoke understandingly, but their conversation was banal.

Fay was filled with pity and sympathy for the boy. Had it not been for her, he would not be in this plight. It was upon her advice that he had decided to become an actor, which was why he had come to Merry Hills. It was because he had found a piece of her dress lying beside the murdered Meadows that he had refrained from giving the alarm, as a result of which act of omission most of the trouble had followed.

Who knows, if he had alarmed the hotel, that the murderer might not have been caught within an hour, since he could not have had ten minutes start in his escape?

Fay had determined to prove an alibi for him in the Doolittle case. They had gone upstairs at twelve o'clock. She would

swear that he entered her room and they had discussed plays until two or three in the morning. Since he had protected her, she would protect him, and the detective would have to convict him of the Meadows crime, if they could affect his alibi in the second murder. As for the Meadows murder, she felt she could help in that also, though her course was not yet clear.

But in this unsatisfactory interview nothing of what was running through both minds could be expressed. Consciousness of an eavesdropper forced her to say agreeable nothings. Once when she dropped her voice the police witness had the impudence to say "Louder, please."

She flashed him a look of indignation, grasped Howard by both hands, smiled some of her emotion into his consciousness and took her departure.

Nevertheless her visit cheered him up immensely. He did not dare to hope that Fay was in love with him, but he felt that her kindness was almost akin to it. Had he been sure of her affection, he would not have spoken of love, for his situation was not one to be offered to a beautiful young girl.

Fay paid for her courage in visiting the jail, for she was snapped by three photographers who were lounging on the steps, and compelled to return evasive answers to several reporters who swooped down upon the woman in the case, demanded interviews, asked boldly if she were engaged to Wheelock, and had the impudence to request a report of what she had said to the accused and what he had replied.

Back at the hotel she had a session with the tearful Mrs. Meadows, who had been compelled to close the season of the stock company, and whose bills for the entire week more than equaled the receipts for the two thirds of a week that had been played under her management. The poor woman had come to Merry Hills without funds. To be exact she had about forty dollars. She had O K'd the advertising and printing bills Doolittle had passed on to her. Had the company finished the week, as business was progressing, it is probable that the Saturday matinée and Saturday night performances would have given her a profit on the entire week of twelve or fifteen hundred dollars. This small fortune, to her, had been snatched from her grasp by fate, in the person of the murderer of Doolittle and the bloodhound of the law, Ferguson. Now she was wondering how to pay her hotel bill.

Mrs. Meadows was the whiney type of woman, and Fay lost patience with her useless recriminations. Finally she came to the point.

"Now that Wheelock is in jail and going to be convicted, the money he stole from my husband is no good to him. If you could get him to tell me where a little of it is, I would be so grateful."

"Mr. Wheelock didn't have any more to do with killing those men than you did," Fay informed her in exasperation, "and I am sure you know just as much about the location of the stolen money."

"Oh, of course, you would stand up for him! Anybody could have seen at the last performance that you were crazy about him. If he didn't kill my husband and steal my money, I'd like to know who did."

"So would I," said Fay dryly, and left her.

After lunch Harrison Gray joined Fay as she lingered in the dingy lobby. He seemed rather nervous and irritable, and the girl laughingly taxed him with being out of sorts.

"It's true," he admitted. "Being marooned in this town without occupation, eating this horrible fare, feeling the eyes of the yokels boring into me because I happen to be an actor in this accursed company—it's all getting on my nerves. At any minute I am liable to go mad and run around biting people. If you want to save me from such a fate, come for a stroll. If they won't let us leave town nobody has yet objected to my taking long walks within its boundaries, though I think a funny looking flatfoot in citizen's clothes is trailing me at a safe distance. I haven't any evidence to give against Wheelock, so why should they keep me here, or you for that matter?"

"I don't mind a walk. I enjoyed our stroll yesterday," she said. "I'll be with you in a moment."

When they left the hotel he set a brisk pace which she followed without difficulty.

"You are like an English girl in your ability to walk, and the way you pal with a fellow," he complimented her.

"Lots of American girls are like this," she told him. "You haven't met the right ones if you have a different opinion of us."

"What do you say we cut and run out of here?" he suggested. "You told me you wanted to get away. If you'll come with me I can bribe our garage man to meet us a mile out of town with a car and run us for twenty miles or so to where we can get a train and get into New York. As we are only witnesses, they can't get us back into Jersey without more trouble and expense than they will probably wish to go to. I think we would have to be extradited, and first they would have to find us."

"How absurd!" she laughed. "We couldn't hide. We have no money, and we should be compelled to accept stage positions where we would be conspicuous enough to suit any policeman."

"I had a stroke of luck a few days ago," he told her. "Some stock that I thought worthless has suddenly ballooned, and I have ordered my broker to sell. I'll have money enough so that we could both go to Canada, and get work in stock up there, together."

He gazed at her rather languishingly.

"You mean that you would stake me until we found jobs?"

"If you would permit it."

"But it would take a lot of money, considerably more than a thousand dollars, for we might be a month getting employment."

"I can stand it. What do you say?"

"I would be afraid. And besides I couldn't accept a loan from a man."

"But we are good friends, we might be more if you felt the way I do."

"Are you proposing to me?"

"Well, yes, that's what it amounts to."

No woman receives a proposal of marriage without being a bit thankful, and feeling rather kindly toward the man who has done her the honor. Fay felt rather ashamed of herself that she should deliberately have led this man on to a point where he was seriously in love with her. Perhaps he was as innocent of the crimes as she herself and Wheelock, and in such a case she had done him a grave injury. But she did not credit his explanation of his sudden acquisition of money enough for such a program, and Howard was in jail, perhaps in danger of being convicted for offenses of this man.

"I couldn't accept," she told him. "I don't feel strong enough for such a thing, and I feel that theatrical marriages are often a mistake. You have been married before, haven't you?"

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly, "but I am divorced. My marriage was one of those mistakes you speak of. My wife was impossible."

"I might be even more impossible."

"Not you. I'll chance it if you will."

"I'll have to take it under advisement," she temporized. "And meanwhile I strongly advise against making a bolt. It might direct suspicion toward you."

"I suppose you are right," he grumbled, "but it makes me furious. Look at that impudent beggar."

They had reached the open country, and he was calling her attention to a gray squirrel who hadn't yet made up his mind to hibernate, and was regarding them boldly from the trunk of a tree, about thirty feet away.

"I'll fix him," declared the man.

She laughed. "He is too quick for us, you may be sure."

"Watch me, I'll show you something."

He had drawn out a large pocketknife, poised it in his open palm, drew back his arm, and then the knife flew, straight as an arrow driven from a bow, just a silver gleam until it struck the squirrel and impaled him to the trunk of the tree.

Fay gave a scream of indignation and grief; had she realized what he was doing she would have struck up his arm. It was too late now; the little animal was dead.

"Oh," she exclaimed, her eyes flashing, and her foot stamping with rage. "That was the most brutal, horrible, useless thing I ever saw."

The man laughed, walked up to the tree and pulled out his knife, permitting the tiny corpse to fall to the ground.

"Perhaps," he said, "but you must admit it was clever."

The girl had remembered the rôle she was playing, and despite her real emotion she managed a flattering smile.

"It was the most astonishing thing I ever saw. I am sorry for the animal, but it was a marvelous feat."

"He is just a victim of scientific experiment. Think of the countless thousands of guinea pigs, squirrels, and even dogs and cats who die to aid science, most of them suffering agonies, not being dead before they knew what struck them, like this fellow."

"I don't want to think of them," she shuddered.

Gray had recovered from his irritability. The squirrel's blood seemed to have appeased him.

"I am sorry I did that," he said. "I forgot how squeamish women are."

"How did you ever learn to do such a thing?"

"Oh, in the old days in England I was a wonder at throwing knives. My first job in the varieties was as a knife thrower. I had a partner who would stand against a board while I tossed knives from the full width of the stage, making a perfect silhouette of her without ever touching her."

"What happened to her?"

"It was odd," he said with a reminiscent smile. "She was walking to the theater one night. While passing a building in process of erection she was struck by an iron bolt which fell from a height of several stories, and instantly killed. I felt so badly that I gave up the act. Besides I couldn't find another partner."

Fay continued to chatter, but her mind was busy putting things together. So this man was an expert knife wielder. Meadows and Doolittle had both been slain with a knife. Howard had never used one in his life, she was sure. Gray's brutality was evidenced by the massacre of the squirrel. She need look no farther for the slayer of the manager and the leading man—it was Harrison Gray. But she was perfectly aware that she had no proof of any sort; simply a moral certainty based upon the character of the man. It was not enough.

"Let's go back," she said. "We must have walked two miles. Perhaps I am not as active as your English girls."

"Very well. By the way, you won't say anything about my scheme for getting out of here. They might lock me up, you know."

"I may want to go with you, who knows?" she laughed. "A few more dinners at that hotel will make me desperate."

"In that case I hope we get perfectly poisonous food for the next few days. They railroaded Wheelock to the county jail quickly enough, didn't they?"

"Lets not talk about it, I feel so badly."

"Better he than we," he said rather callously. "You and I are safe enough as regards the Meadows murder. I was in bed and heard you come in at twelve o'clock. Wheelock says Meadows was alive at five minutes after twelve. I wonder why he sticks to that story?"

"Why?" she flashed at him.

"Oh, I don't know. As you say, let's talk of something else."

The walk back was quiet. Perhaps Gray felt that he had said too much, and Fay was busy with her thoughts. She was walking alongside a double murderer, but curiously enough, she felt no fear. He worked in the dark, and hid behind innocent men. Undoubtedly he would let Wheelock go to the chair rather than admit his own guilt. What a great, fiendish brute, and he had the impudence to propose marriage to her, a Winsor of New York.

She left him abruptly, and fled to her room where she began to arrange her ideas. No need now for her uncle's detectives to scour England for information regarding Harry Temple who had left the country fifteen years before. He had been a knife thrower in vaudeville.

Had he killed both Meadows and Doolittle by hurling knives at them from a distance, as he had slain the squirrel? It would be easy for him. How blind that detective had been. And what a fool Gray was to have made such a damaging admission to her. The man must be partially mad. Undoubtedly he was planning to leave town, only lingering to induce her to accompany him. Love of women had

ruined many a successful criminal; would that it would be responsible for substituting Gray for Wheelock in the county jail.

Miss Heathington came in to ask her to play bridge with Mrs. Meadows, Franklyn Blythe and herself that evening, and she accepted quickly, because it would prevent her from further converse with Gray. Though she did not fear him, she was afraid he might discover how she loathed him. Fay was a good actress, but she could not trust herself to play this rôle much longer.

Winsor would not be down until noon next day; she burned to disclose her discovery, but she distrusted Ferguson, the detective, and, though he was sitting at the next table at dinner, she did not dream of taking him into her confidence.

By attending strictly to bridge she kept away from Gray all evening. He hung about the lobby, looked in occasionally at the bridge game, obviously was loitering about for an opportunity to chat with her, but when the game finished at eleven o'clock, she pleaded a headache to escape a tête-à-tête with him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAY MAKES A CONFESSION.

FAY kept to her room next morning until she saw from her window the passengers arriving from the New York train, among them her uncle. Then she descended and swooped upon the lawyer.

"Come to my room at once," she said. "Something most important."

"It must be. You are quite excited," he replied. "Give me time to check my bag."

He followed her up the stairs and soon they were seated in her chamber. As their relationship was known she did not hesitate to close the door.

"Well, Fay, what's on your mind?" he demanded as soon as he had lighted his inevitable cigar.

"It's Gray. I'm sure he is the murderer. Wait until you hear what I have discovered."

Winsor put his finger to his lips, stole on tiptoe to the door, and opened it suddenly. There stood Gray with hand upraised, about to tap on the panel.

"I beg your pardon," he said coolly. "I was coming to ask Miss Winsor if she would lunch with me."

"Thank you, Mr. Gray," cooed Fay. "I wish to talk over a family matter with my uncle."

"Later, perhaps," he acquiesced, turned about and walked swiftly down the corridor.

"I suspect these walls of having ears," said the lawyer. "Come out with me and we'll sit in the depot, if necessary, but don't tell me anything here."

"How did you know some one was at the door?"

"I didn't. You were about to disclose something important, and it was a natural precaution. He was undoubtedly planning to listen."

"I hope he didn't hear what I did say to you."

They left the hotel, wandered along Main Street, and turned into a deserted ice cream parlor for the continuation of the conference. He listened to her narrative with close attention, asking a sharp question here and there, and when she had finished he was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"He is the killer beyond the shadow of a doubt, but how the deuce are we going to catch him? His alibi for Saturday night is perfect."

"But it isn't, uncle. I told Howard so, only he was so convinced that Gray couldn't have been guilty that he pooh-poohed my suggestion. Howard left him on the steps of Mrs. Davis's boarding house about eleven forty when he decided he would return to the hotel to wait for me. He got back to the house about twelve fifteen, an interval of thirty-five minutes. Gray claims he called to me when I entered at midnight, but if he did I did not hear him. It is my belief he wasn't in his room at all.

"He got me to agree to say I heard him, claiming it strengthened my alibi, when it actually established his. I see that now. He was in bed when Howard returned, but he might have reached the house only a few minutes ahead of Howard."

"True, but in thirty-five minutes he

could hardly have walked to the hotel and back, which would take twenty minutes, killed a man, stolen his money, and returned to his room, to be found in bed."

"He had a bicycle. He went for a bicycle ride Sunday morning. He could have reached the hotel and be back again in five minutes on a machine. That would give him half an hour at the hotel."

"Why the deuce didn't you tell me these things before? Of course he could have done the job if he had a bicycle?"

"I only worked it all out in my mind last night after finding that he was a knife-thrower. I had no occasion before to doubt the alibi."

"You have the makings of a first-class criminal investigator," said Winsor, admiringly. "I've always said that women would make the best detectives if they had brains, because they also have intuition, and they can get on the soft side of a man, and he will tell them things he would not dream of admitting to one of his own sex.

"Now perhaps you can tell me how to get around the muddle we are in. Wheelock has testified that Meadows was alive at twelve five. If he tells the truth now it won't be believed, for it will be the third version of the affair that he has given. We have got to find some one who saw Gray approach the hotel on a bicycle, or leave it, around midnight. And who can prove the boy's story that Meadows was dead when he found him?"

"I can," said the girl in a low tone.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Are you crazy?"

"No, but I saw Meadows die."

"For Heaven's sake, what do you mean?"

"I did not tell all I knew, even to Howard. When he came to my room that night and told me of the murder, I was out of my senses, but I pretended not to know that Meadows was dead. Next day, when I realized all Howard was doing for me, I was ashamed to admit I had lied to him the night before. Of course I have been ready to tell the true version, but it sounded so unbelievable that I feared no one would credit it. Now it is easily explained."

"Perhaps you will condescend to tell me exactly what happened that night. You should have confided in me immediately."

"I was wrong," she admitted. "I'll tell you now. I went to Meadows's room about twenty-five minutes of twelve. He received me as I have explained. But when I said I had not entered his chamber, it was not true. He called me in to show me the money instead of bringing it into the parlor.

"Then things happened as I have already told you, chairs and tables were overturned. He tore the sleeve out of my jacket. He was standing by the bed facing the door leading to the sitting room when I pulled away. My back was to the door. Suddenly I saw him clap his hands to his breast, stagger and fall. I saw the hilt of a knife sticking out of his chest. No one was near him. I saw nobody, heard nothing. At one moment he was facing me, the torn sleeve in his hand, the next he had toppled upon the floor. I was beside myself, thought only of getting away. If I summoned assistance no one would believe that I had not struck him with the knife. I would be convicted of murder.

"My only hope was to escape unseen. I stooped over him, but he seemed to me to be quite dead. My sleeve was in his hand, part of it under the body; I did not dare touch it. Wildly I ran out of the room, and when I was part way down the corridor I realized that my arm was naked. If I passed through the lobby in that condition they would investigate at once, find him dead, and accuse me. So I ran to the end of the corridor and down the servants' stairs. I got home as I have already explained."

"You saw no one in the sitting room?"

"I did not notice; you see, I could not understand how he could have been killed with a knife from a distance, and it never occurred to me that it could have been thrown from the doorway. Now I know that Gray was in the room, and took advantage of the struggle to hurl a knife as he hurled one at the squirrel.

"When I left he ran into the bedroom, seized the money on the bureau, spent ten or fifteen minutes searching for more, es-

caped, perhaps, the way I did, mounted his bicycle and reached home before Howard. Possibly he was there in time to see me enter and slipped in immediately afterward."

Winsor nodded when she finished. Fay had become excited as she lived over again her frightful experience.

"You were struggling with the man, and he suddenly falls with a knife in his chest. No jury would believe you were innocent if you told them that story. I doubt if Howard Wheelock, much as he may love you, could have credited it had you related the whole truth at the time. I think you did well to suppress it."

"You can imagine how I have suffered, permitting Howard to stay in jail for my sake when I could have cleared him. And if they send me to the chair I will save him."

"Knowing that Gray was a professional knife thrower makes all the difference in the world. But the man saw you in the room at the moment that Meadows died. He realizes that you are the only person who knows how the old man was killed. Why should he give you that demonstration with the squirrel? Doesn't he realize that if you have any intelligence you will comprehend that Meadows was struck by a knife thrown from a distance? And why did he admit to you that he had been a professional knife thrower?"

"Unless he is crazy in love, I don't understand."

"He is either quite mad or he had some sinister motive in telling you these things. Why was he listening at your door tonight? Did he suspect that you would tell me what you had learned?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Neither do I. I can usually deduce a man's processes if he is sane. I can understand now how he killed Doolittle. I could not comprehend how the murderer could have crept upon his second victim whose senses must have been alert, and thrust a knife in his back. But evidently he was hiding in the darkness, while Doolittle had a lantern which threw his figure into bold relief. It would be an easy matter for such a man to throw his knife without coming near his victim.

"My dear, you have solved this mystery so far as I am concerned, but I am very much worried about you. He may have come to believe that you suspect him, and he killed the squirrel to see if you would betray yourself, in which case he would eliminate you also, or he was sufficiently mad in love to wish to show off to you. In either case he is suspicious, now, since he tried to hear your conversation with me in your room. Let us stroll back to the hotel. I do not want to alarm you, but forewarned is forearmed, and you may depend upon me to protect you now that I know from what quarter danger is threatened."

They paid for their uneaten ice cream and left the place. Of all persons Gray happened to be passing. His presence indicated that he had followed them.

"Don't take any more chances of being alone with him," the lawyer warned her in a low tone, and a second later the actor was in front of them, lifting his hat.

"Miss Winsor, do you suppose your uncle will excuse you for another stroll with me? There are some things I would like to discuss with you."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gray," she said. "I have to go back to the hotel, but if you wish to talk to me in the lobby I shall be glad to hear you."

"A little later, then," he agreed politely, and continued on his way.

"No more strolls with him as you value your life. I got a look at his eyes, and I think he is mad," said the attorney. "Remember!"

"You needn't warn me. He frightens me to death," she said.

"Then you are a wonderful actress, for there was nothing in your manner but kindliness and friendship. Stay in the public lobby all afternoon, and by dinner time I shall have made arrangements to take care of you."

They parted at the hotel, Winsor setting forth in search of Ferguson, the detective, for he felt that professional aid was vital at this stage of the game. He found his quarry at police headquarters very well pleased with the progress of his case.

"Well, Mr. Criminal Lawyer, how's your

courage? I've got my man safely locked up in the county jail, and an indictment by the grand jury is sure."

"There will be no grand jury action on Wheelock, but I'll have the real criminal for you within twelve hours, unless I am very much mistaken."

"What the deuce is biting you?" scoffed the detective. "I've got him, and all I need is a little direct evidence."

"Wait till you hear my story. Sit down, man, it will take some time."

The detective seated himself rather impatiently, but Winsor had not been talking long before he held his complete interest.

He began at the beginning and related the real facts regarding the murder of Meadows. Then he told about Gray's slaying of the squirrel, and admission that he had thrown knives for a living in England. It did not take Ferguson a minute to appreciate that disclosure.

"That would account for getting Doolittle in the back," he admitted; "but who the deuce would have thought of one of those knife hurlers? I saw one at a circus once; he could hit a ten-cent piece from forty feet.

"The trouble with this case from the beginning," added the detective testily, "is that those two kids lied so about the death of Meadows that I never dreamed of Gray. Why, Wheelock and Miss Winsor were responsible for his alibi. It's all their own fault. You needn't worry about their evidence being inacceptable. I didn't have to present any at the hearing this morning, and I will accept the present explanation as the correct one. But all we have on Gray is that he was once a knife thrower, and that he seems to have come into money suddenly. We can investigate the story of selling stock, and prove that a lie without trouble. But we have to prove he left the Davis house on a bicycle, and I've combed this town for people who saw anything suspicious that night and haven't found a soul."

"If what I suspect is true we may not need further evidence. It is my belief that he will make an attempt upon Miss Winsor's life to-night, and I want your coöperation to protect her."

"He wouldn't be fool enough to try to kill a third person."

"I think the man is mad, and a madman is capable of anything. He is cunning, and probably realizes now that he betrayed himself when he killed the squirrel. He is liable to try to murder her, and possibly attack me, since he thinks she has confided her suspicions to me."

"What's your plan?"

"I shall pretend to take the night train to New York. I want Fay to retire, but not to her own room. I shall engage an extra room for a friend to-night."

"No. Let her take my room, the other is suspicious."

"All right. We'll fix up a dummy in her bed. Conceal one of your men in a closet, others in near-by rooms. You and I shall keep watch also. If he attempts to enter her room, if we can catch him with another knife in his hand you don't need further evidence that he killed Doolittle and Meadows."

"I should say not!"

"We'll also rig up a dummy in my bed. It may be that he will enter my room, though if I leave the hotel ostentatiously to take a night train he will probably think that she is alone and unprotected. He will hardly surmise that we are expecting an attack on the girl."

"Well, I hope he shows his hand, though he's been so clever so far that I doubt it. It would certainly settle this case if we caught him trying to kill some one else. Count on me, Mr. Winsor. All I wanted from the start was to see justice done. The girl's testimony will clear Wheelock, any way, though it might go hard with her if we hadn't this dope on the knife thrower.

"I've had a flattie on Gray's trail right along, though I didn't really think he was guilty, and if he tried to make a get-away, as he told Miss Winsor he was figuring on doing, he would find out that it wasn't so easy.

"Another thing that threw me off at the start was the testimony that the knife which killed Meadows was the old man's property, that he had been using it as a paper cutter. And if Gray is a knife thrower it explains why we found no thumb-prints on the hilt

of either knife which had been used. They lay the knife on the palm of the hand, their fingers don't touch the hilt at all, and they hurl it with an arm movement.

"I should say that Gray had a set of these knives; perhaps the one on Meadows's table had been given by him to the old man. After he killed him Gray might have carried away the paper cutter to replace the knife which was sticking in Meadows's heart.

"Oh, this thing is coming clearer every minute, but I want to remind you that it was due to my system that we are getting the facts. If I hadn't nabbed Wheelock, Miss Winsor would not have brought you down here, and she only started on Gray's trail because she was trying desperately to find a way to save her young man."

"Well, if you can pat yourself on the back for that, go ahead," Winsor said with a chuckle. "All that interests me is getting Wheelock off and cleaning up here. My business is suffering. Neither Miss Winsor nor myself are anxious to set up as detectives. You can have all the glory."

"I'll hang around the lobby all afternoon myself," said Ferguson blandly, accepting the proffered credit. "I stop there and it won't make Gray feel suspicious to see me around. It will prevent him starting anything against Miss Winsor until to-night. He must be under a frightful strain, having committed two murders and being compelled to stay on the scene of his crimes."

"Where do you suppose he keeps his knives?"

"He must have hidden them immediately after the Meadows crime, because I searched his quarters very thoroughly as a matter of principle. Probably took them with him on that bicycle trip Sunday morning along with the money he stole from Meadows's room."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NIGHT VIGIL.

THEY separated, Ferguson to make his arrangements, Winsor to go back to the hotel to keep an eye on Fay. He found her playing bridge in the ladies' room with other members of the company. Gray was reading a newspaper in the main lobby, and Winsor, on impulse, sat down beside him to engage in conversation.

He was impressed by the man's ease of manner, his casualness, and his geniality. They chatted of various things, the show business, the law, the stock market and national politics. Finally Winsor said:

"It must be an awful bore for you to be compelled to remain in this one-horse town after your employment here has been suspended."

"You said something. I feel as though I could beat up the whole population, I hate the place so. How long are they liable to keep us here?"

"In your case, not very long. You will be asked to tell what you know to the Grand Jury which meets in a week or so, after which, I think, you can be released on a bond, to appear at the trial. A bond may not be required of you since I do not think the prosecution considers you an important witness. You were at home in bed the night of the Meadows murder, and while you were in the theater where Doolittle was killed, I believe the prosecution contends that the murderer of Meadows must have killed Doolittle, and is bending all its energies to secure a conviction on that case."

"Indeed," said Gray in a relieved tone. "Well, my alibi on Saturday night is a perfect one. I know nothing whatever about the Meadows case, so I shouldn't have any trouble getting away."

"It would seem not."

"Why are you defending Wheelock?" demanded the actor. "Is there any secret understanding between him and Miss Winsor that causes her to bring her famous uncle down to defend a brutal murderer? It must be costing you a lot of money to spend so much time here."

"When I was called down here it looked as though my niece might be implicated in some way by the stupid police. My family name was in jeopardy. If I lost a hundred thousand dollars I had to prevent that. She had a comradely interest in Wheelock, she believed that he was as innocent as she was and she asked me, as a matter of abstract justice, to see that he got a square deal!"

"Do you think you can get him off?"

"I don't know. The evidence against him is pretty strong, but somehow I don't think he did it."

"I find it hard to believe," said Gray, apparently in great sincerity. "But unless I consider myself or Mrs. Meadows, or your niece or old Blythe guilty, I have to think that he is the murderer. You see how it is."

"Well," said Winsor, stretching out his arms, "I've got some papers in my brief case and I might as well look them over. This isn't the only legal affair which is bothering me. See you later, Mr. Gray."

He went up to his room considerably perplexed. If Gray was insane he gave no evidence of it. His conversation was intelligent, his manner normal, save that he was obviously nervous, and that was perfectly understandable; his eyes were clear and he looked his interlocutor squarely in the face. His fingers alone betrayed that he was laboring under some sort of emotion, for they moved continuously, drumming on the side of his chair or beating a tattoo on the air.

That this man might be planning to murder a beautiful and sweet young woman that very night did not seem within the bounds of possibility; that he suspected the lawyer of having incriminating information against him was certainly not evident in his manner.

If Gray made no move to silence Fay it was going to be very difficult to convict him of the double murder, the sum total of all evidence against him was still less than what Ferguson had on Wheelock. Supposing a third knife murder occurred that night. Wheelock, accused of the first two crimes, was safe in jail, obviously he could not have committed it. If Gray were not mad he would realize that a third crime would absolve Wheelock of the first two and point to the actors at liberty as including among them the perpetrator of all three. And Gray did not seem mad, naturally he would make no move. Winsor was rather ashamed of his elaborate preparations, but having gone so far he would go through with them.

At dinner that night he told Fay what she was expected to do. He exchanged significant looks with Ferguson sitting across the room. He told the room clerk in a clear tone that he was taking a night train to New York. As Gray was present he could not fail to overhear that the lawyer was departing.

The evening wore on very slowly and stupidly. Finally Winsor conducted Fay upstairs, while Ferguson remained in the lobby watching Gray. The lawyer opened the door of the detective's room, four doors down on the opposite side of the third floor corridor from three hundred and five, her own chamber, and the girl slipped in and locked the door on the inside.

Then the lawyer went to his own room, took his grip, said good-by to Ferguson and looked around for Gray, but he was not to be found.

"Where is he?" in a whisper.

"Went down to the corner to get a soft drink. Said he would be right back."

"Fine. The coast is clear upstairs. Fay is locked in your room."

The attorney left the hotel and walked briskly towards the station. It was only five or six minutes' walk through streets already deserted. These streets were badly paved and the sidewalks worn and uneven.

Pondering over the possibilities of the night he was not watching his step, and an unexpected indentation in the sidewalk caused his ankle to turn over so sharply as to precipitate him to the sidewalk.

At that second he heard a thud against the wooden wall of a house beyond him, and glancing up, as he scrambled to his feet, he saw something glittering and quivering in the side of the house. It was a knife, two inches of which were buried in the soft pine wood.

The happy accident which caused him to fall had saved his life, for the knife would have struck him in the back.

The unexpected had happened, the mad knife thrower had decided to eliminate him instead of Fay. She had been surrounded with all precautions; it had not occurred to him to protect his own stroll to the railroad station.

He was on his feet in a second, darted around the corner, but there was nobody running away, no sign of an assassin.

Knowing that Winsor was going to the station, Gray had excused himself to the detective, whose thoughts were occupied with what might happen upstairs, and stepped out of the hotel. He had hurried over the route to the station and selected a hiding place from which he could hurl a knife. Probably he had intended to push the body into an areaway where it would not be discovered for hours, go back to the hotel, settle with Fay, and then make his escape.

Since Winsor was defending Wheelock, and Ferguson was conducting the investigation for the prosecution, Gray was unlikely to suspect that the two men were good friends and exchanging confidences. With Winsor and Fay both out of the way he might think it safe to brazen things out in Merry Hills.

But the attack on Winsor had failed. Did Gray know it?

The lawyer had fallen at the instant that the knife was supposed to have struck him. With the confidence of the expert, perhaps Gray had assumed that his coup had succeeded, perhaps he had intended to permit the body to lay where it had fallen. Had he waited a few seconds after throwing the weapon he could not have failed to see the lawyer struggle to his feet, but in that case Winsor would have seen him making his escape. There was no time to be lost. Winsor pulled the knife out of the wood. It was a weapon with an eight-inch blade of polished, fine steel, nine and a half inches, including the hilt, which had a short crosspiece, a duplicate of the instrument which had killed Doolittle and Meadows, evidently part of the knife thrower's set. He put it gingerly in his pocket since it had no sheath, and, gritting his teeth against the pain in his ankle, limped as rapidly as he could back to the hotel.

Gray was nowhere to be seen, but the detective was still on guard, puffing upon a cigar.

"Seen Gray?" demanded Winsor.

"Yep. He came in a minute after you left and went upstairs. The boys are on duty."

"Did anybody follow him out?"

"No, I let the man who was watching him off the job. Needed him upstairs. Why?"

"Oh, nothing, only he tried to murder me just now."

"Great jumping Jehosephat! When? Where? How?"

The lawyer told him briefly.

"I have the knife in my pocket; it's a duplicate of the other two."

"He must think he got you or he would not have come back to the hotel. He'll attack Miss Winsor right away, for he knows your body will be found within an hour or two. Let's get to our posts."

The Merry Hills Hotel was a long, narrow building with a central corridor, from which rooms opened on both sides and at the end. The staircase from the lobby landed persons at the front end of the corridor, and at the rear was a narrow staircase used by the servants. It was by this that Fay had escaped the Saturday night before.

Gray's room was on the third floor on the left, three doors down from that of Fay, and on the same side. A man was stationed in the room opposite the actress's, watching the corridor through the transom. A policeman was hidden in the closet in her room. Two other officers were concealed in the adjoining room, to emerge at the first sound. Ferguson and Winsor entered the room at the front end which had formerly been occupied by Meadows and which, of course, had not been rented since. They stood on chairs in the dark, looking through the transom. Sooner or later they expected to see Gray's door open and the knife thrower tiptoe down the corridor.

The hours dragged by slowly, interminably. The watchers suffered the tortures of those who wait in uncomfortable positions. It might have been 5 A.M. when the door of Fay's room opened and the officer who had been hidden inside emerged, waving his arm as a signal. Immediately the men on guard came from their posts. He led them into the room and turned on the lights. Lying huddled under the clothes was the dummy and, sticking in its back, through the bedclothes was a knife.

"When did this happen?" demanded Ferguson.

"I don't know," replied the officer.

"You don't know. Why the deuce don't you know? You must have heard him come in."

"No one came in. I didn't hear a sound."

Ferguson examined the position of the knife. Its hilt pointed to the window, which was open. He rushed to the window and looked out and an exclamation escaped him. About four feet below the window was a two-inch ledge running around the house. The would-be assassin had proceeded from his own room along this ledge, a most difficult and dangerous proceeding, softly pushed up the sash of the window, discerned the still form in the bed and hurled his steel. Had Fay been sleeping there she would have been transfixed.

"It's all we need. To his room!" commanded the detective. They ran to his door and found it locked. Ferguson gave a full rush and forced it with his shoulder. The room was empty.

"I didn't expect to find him," he grunted. "He may have been gone for four or five hours. What a fine lot of saps we are!"

"Any guards in the streets?" asked Winsor.

"No," replied Ferguson, rather abashed.

"Well, these two attempts to-night are all the evidence you need. And his flight is a confession. I'm satisfied."

"But I haven't got my man," groaned Ferguson.

"That's your funeral. I want Wheelock released immediately."

"We'll withdraw our charges, don't worry. All that interests me now is catching this fellow. He evidently got away by the window. Let's see what we find in his room."

They found nothing except some abandoned clothing in his wardrobe trunk and some costumes. He had evidently taken a suit case, lowered it from his window and escaped, but there was no rope hanging from the window to betray the method by which he had fled.

"Well, we'll get him," said Ferguson. "A man can't keep out of reach very long with modern methods of hunting criminals."

"This fellow may give you more trouble than you think," Winsor informed him. "He is a skillful actor, trained in make-up. He may be disguised as a negro, an Italian, a laborer—oh, he probably has a hundred disguises."

"He can't change his finger-prints, and I've got them."

"Really? How did you manage."

"Took them off his knife and fork in the dining room this evening, as soon as I got suspicious of him."

"I congratulate you. They will probably do the trick for you."

They emerged into the corridor to find Fay in a bathrobe, the night clerk and two or three guests in various stages of undress, who had been awakened by the noise made in breaking in the door. The detective explained as curtly as he could what had happened and the curious guests went back to bed.

"What a night!" exclaimed Fay to her uncle. "I couldn't sleep a wink, and I thought the morning would never come."

"It's come," he grinned, "but our bird has flown."

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

"OH," she wailed, "then our situation is exactly where it was and Howard stays in jail."

"On the contrary, Gray has shown his hand by trying to kill both you and me, and your friend will probably be free by nightfall. We know now who is the murderer, and it's simply a question of time to catch him. Go back to bed."

"No, I'm going to dress. Uncle, can I take the good news to Howard? I want to be the one to tell him that he is exonerated."

"How about it, Ferguson?"

The detective smiled at the anxious girl.

"We owe our evidence against Gray to you, Miss Winsor, and you owe your life to your uncle's hunch which caused us to change your room to-night. I'll arrange for you to see Mr. Wheelock this morning and tell him that he is going to be set free. Mr. Clerk, how about an early breakfast for a

lot of hungry people who have been up all night?"

"We'll have it ready for you at six thirty."

"Fine, that will give me time to send out a general alarm to pick up Gray."

By the time they had finished breakfast word was received from Winchenton, ten miles to the north, which ended the manhunt almost before it had begun.

An automobile filled with roisterers from a roadhouse had run down a bicycle traveling without lights and ridden by a colored man. The police of Winchenton had brought in the body and discovered that the dead rider had been a white man who had covered his face and hands with burned cork. It was Gray, the murderer of Meadows and Doolittle, killed by an act of Providence and a drunken chauffeur, less than an hour after his escape from Merry Hills.

The murderer had been found too late to pay his legal penalty, but upon his person was nothing to indicate where he had hidden the money he had stolen from the persons of Meadows and Doolittle. It was not until after some weeks of search that Ferguson discovered how he had disposed of the loot.

In the general delivery in New York addressed to Harry Temple were a dozen long envelopes, all postmarked Merry Hills. When opened they were found to contain nothing but bank notes. Gray had been posting them from various mail boxes in Merry Hills, taking care not to place too many bills in any one envelope, and had thus got his stealings out of town without attracting any attention. The total amount of money found in the twelve envelopes was forty-two hundred dollars, about what it had been estimated was the value of Meadows's savings. The money was turned over to Mrs. Meadows and compensated her for the loss of her stock company.

Gray had expected to go to the New York post office when he was permitted to leave Merry Hills, prove his identity as Harry Temple, an easy matter since that was his real name, and secure his loot without question.

Shortly after eleven that morning Fay Winsor was conducted by the warden of the county jail to the cell of the suspected murderer, Howard Wheelock.

The young actor had been supplied with a table and he was writing busily, when the rattling of the key in his lock warned him that he had a visitor approaching. Then he saw the beautiful, radiant and eager face of the girl he loved, and he sprang to his feet with an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Fay, this is wonderful!" he exclaimed, grasping her hand.

She smiled joyously up at him. "Not half as wonderful as what I have to tell you. You are going to be set free. We know who did the killing. It was Harrison Gray!"

"But that is not possible," he protested. "Gray was in bed at Mrs. Davis's when Meadows was killed."

"That's all you know about it. Won't you take my word for it?"

"Of course, but how did they find out?" he asked.

They sat on the side of his bunk while she told him the whole story. Characteristically, Howard was more horrified at the risk that she had run in associating with the murderer than he was pleased at his own release.

"Supposing your uncle had not suspected that he had decided to put you out of the way? You would have been killed as surely as were Meadows and Doolittle."

His apprehension was so sincere that Fay loved him for it. She moved a little closer, so that their shoulders touched. Howard obviously enjoyed the position, but made no advances. Fay boldly took his left arm and clasped it around her waist.

"Now tell me all the nice things you think about me," she demanded.

Man is supposed to be a conceited animal, but Wheelock was one of the exceptions that prove the rule. Not until she had forcibly placed his arm around her waist and demanded that he tell her his opinion of her did it dawn on him that the girl might reciprocate the feeling he experienced for her. Fay was so self-confident, so keen, so brilliant, and he had done nothing whatever to win the affections of such a creature. Manlike, he thought that the way to win a

woman's love was to go out and overcome great obstacles.

Up to the present he had been the receiving end for all sorts of afflictions; his rôle had been a passive one.

He didn't know that women love men for what they think them, not for what they actually do. Fay loved him for his sweetness, his calm courage, his ambitions and the way his hair was parted.

"When I get out of here," he said, "and when I have done something worth while I'm going to tell you what I think of you."

"Don't wait, tell me now."

He blushed and tried to turn away from the big eyes which were so close to his and which seemed to be exploring his brain.

"Kiss me, Howard," said the girl. "Then stop wiggling and propose to me properly. You know you are crazy about me."

That was encouragement enough. He kissed her, and proposed to her, and she accepted him, and then he kissed her again and she kissed him. They kept this up quite awhile.

"When did you first know you loved me?" he demanded.

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps it was the moment I saw you sitting in Hinchberg's office sorting out the sheets of your absurd play. You looked so like a disappointed baby."

"It was a terrible play, but do you know I am writing another, and this one is good. I've learned a lot about life and people since I came to Merry Hills, and I know now what makes a dramatic situation, and something of the movement of my characters. Thanks to my own experience the night of the murder and in my various prison cells I know the difference between real emotion and theatrical stuff. I know you will like this play."

"I know I shall," she asserted. "How far have you got with it?"

"I have a complete synopsis and part of the first act."

"Let me see the synopsis."

She grasped it from his hand and read rapidly but understandingly. Then she turned shining eyes upon him.

"Howard, this is a play," she told him. "It is a very ingenious idea and it's the way things happen, nothing absurd or theatrical in any of your situations. Now if you can manage the dialogue, you will have something."

"You'll help me?"

"Of course."

They talked of many things including their future. Considering their really straitened circumstances, they were astonishingly hopeful. Neither of them realized that they were sitting in a prison cell. It was the most comfortable and beautiful spot in the world. They loved its privacy.

But the privacy of a cell can be disturbed. The key rattled and Ferguson came in upon them. They regarded him like an intruding insect, but he laughed.

"You've been here five hours, Miss Winsor. You can take your young man away with you now. All formalities are concluded, and we may need this cell for another customer. No hard feelings, I hope, Wheelock. You were my best bet as a murderer until I found a better one."

"None whatever," smiled Wheelock. "You see Miss Winsor has promised to marry me. Had it not been for your jailing me, she might never have accepted me."

"Say, I could see you were nuts on each other the day I questioned you both for the first time. You didn't have a chance of getting away, young fellow. Did he, Miss Winsor?"

Fay smiled brazenly. "He did not. I don't mind admitting, Howard, that I only took the job in Merry Hills because I knew you were here. I wanted to see you again."

He squeezed her hand tenderly and looked at her almost incredulously. He could not believe his luck.

When they got to Merry Hills, they found Winsor waiting for them and all three hastened to conclude their stay in the town where so much had happened. The lawyer could see how it was with them and ventured to advise them.

On the train going back to New York he asked them their plans. They had none.

"Don't you think it inadvisable to get married while you both are out of employment?" he asked.

"We do," replied Fay, "but we are go-

ing to get married immediately just the same and chance any consequences. Howard talked as you do, but the future doesn't worry me. He is writing a play which will make us rich."

"You are a pair of poor benighted children, but if you insist on marrying I'll see you through, and I'll give you my cottage on Long Island for a honeymoon residence. It is cold down there in the winter, but there is a good heating plant in the house, and Wheelock can write his play—if he finds time," he added significantly.

Fay embraced him in the exuberance of her gratitude and Wheelock took him gratefully by the hand.

"I can't ever repay you for what you have done for me and Fay in getting us out of the mess in Merry Hills. Without you they might never have suspected Gray and they might have sent me to the chair."

"Without me, you would have probably escaped. You see, the man was crazy and he would have betrayed himself sooner or later. He might not have been insane when he killed Meadows, but he certainly was when he murdered Doolittle and he was batty as a loon when he took Fay for a walk and betrayed himself by murdering a poor little squirrel.

"A sane man would not have attacked Fay and myself; it was tantamount to a confession of guilt. The burden of murder is a terrible one, the knowledge that you have taken on a contest alone against the entire world of mankind. I don't care how clever the criminal, how skillfully he plots; when he has killed his man, the knowledge that society will never let up its search for the murderer wears him out. Gray blew up quickly, that's all."

Howard and Fay were quietly married a few days later and went gratefully to the Winsor cottage for their honeymoon. And in the meantime something happened. Hinchberg produced Howard's first play. As Fay had suspected, it was the roadhouse idea which had appealed to him, and the drama had been entirely rewritten, most of the characters changed and all the scenes and incidents. The piece made a hit from the start. The program carried the name of Howard Wheelock as co-author with William Black, the celebrated playwright. Howard and Fay journeyed up to town to see it, and the original author had to admit that there wasn't a single line in it written by himself.

Nevertheless, his name associated with a Broadway success had a certain effect. He found managers ready to read his new play, which he finished with Fay's aid during the honeymoon, and Hinchberg himself agreed to produce it on the usual royalty basis.

"Say, this is a play," admitted the manager. "It don't need much to make it all right. The other was a bunch of junk and you were lucky to get five hundred for it. I guess the little lady had a lot to do with turning out this one."

"She certainly did," admitted Howard.

"Well, the fact that I can advertise you as the author of the hit I got now, and that you are the guy they almost electrocuted down in Jersey, and that you probably wrote it in your prison cell—all good publicity angles. I'll hustle this along and make a production in six or eight weeks."

The new play, "A Man's Wife," was not a stupendous hit, but it made some money, ran four months on Broadway and toured for a year, paying the author enough to enable him to live in comfort with his wife and starting him successfully as a playwright. Fay was perfectly willing to give up acting; she loved her husband, did not wish to be separated from him, and she had trouped for several years so that the glamour was gone from the profession. They have an attractive apartment in the East Twenties and are one of the happiest young couples in New York.

THE END

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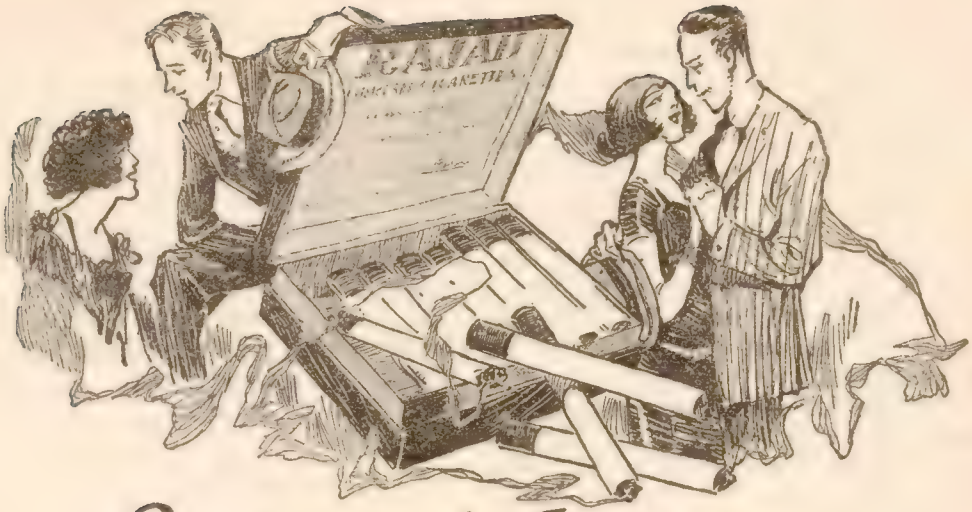
If you have enjoyed "The Gleaming Blade," by Mr. MacIsaac, be sure to get in on the opening chapters of his new serial, "Rogues' Rule," a part of our Greater Stories campaign next month.



Lady Nicotine Assists

By GORDON STILES

IT is only by looking down from the eminence of mature years that the possibilities of twenty-one can be grasped. But nobody, either boy or girl, of that delightful age realizes this—nor can be expected to do so. All he knows about it is that the world is his playground; work is incidental, a necessity to be accepted as gracefully as may be. Which is exactly as it should be.

And because he was not the son of a rich man or a famous man, because nobody was dependent upon him and therefore he had no responsibilities, Bert Frisbie looked upon life and found it good. For *he* was twenty-one. Further, he had a comfortable home toward which he contributed the nominal sum of seven dollars and fifty cents weekly, leaving him a balance of twenty-two fifty to disburse as he saw fit.

With the above residue, Bert managed to dress neatly and have as much fun as is good for a young chap of his years. He "trained" with a crowd of lads in approximately the same circumstances as himself, worried not at all as to the future and wouldn't have changed places with anybody else in the world.

His favorite companion was Jack Bundy who worked alongside him in the Rajah cigarette factory which occupies a whole block on Tenth Avenue, New York City. Bert was an assistant bookkeeper and Jack was another assistant bookkeeper. Their pay was the same.

Funny how trifling events lead to important ones. But they do. And if Bert had not happened to be passing through the packing room, on a certain June morning—and if he had not chanced to stop where he did, at the time he did, this story would never have been written. For the

very good reason that there would have been no story to write.

As it was, Bert saw, from the corner of his eye, as he fumbled in a basket of shipping orders, that Eileen Murphy, freckled-nosed little wretch, was putting something besides cigarettes into the "hundred box" she was filling. He saw her chuckling and talking to her neighbor; then she wrote something on a slip of white paper and stuck the slip under the first layer of cigarettes. Jut then the noon whistle blew and Eileen, with the rest of the girls, flew to the coat room.

Bert was just curious enough to investigate. Removing the top tier from the box in question, he found that Eileen had written: "Please write to a lonely working girl," and signed her name, giving her home address. Bert laughed, replaced the slip and cigarettes and went about his business.

But late that afternoon, when bookkeepers, as well as other classes of help are prone to watch the hour hand edging up to the numeral V, the incident of the noon hour bore fruit. Carrying an invoice as camouflage, Bert crossed to where Jack sat and leaned over that young person's desk.

Evidently there was something very funny about that invoice because after Bert had talked rapidly for some thirty seconds, his friend delivered a huge snort, followed by a series of gurgles.

Bert hastily returned to his post, but both he and Jack lingered until the office was clear after quitting time.

Then together they slipped out into the deserted packing room. Each produced from his pocket a bit of paper prepared before leaving the office. They compared notes.

On the slip which Bert laid down was the typewritten message:

> Just for a lark—drop a line to a good scout. DOROTHY CARTER.
> 862 West Thirty-Seventh Street, New York City.

The address given was Bert's own. But he could attend to that, all right.

Jack had performed a similar stunt with the other bit of paper. Which really has nothing to do with subsequent events, and therefore can be considered a closed incident.

Suffice it to say that the messages were duly tucked away in two freshly packed boxes of cigarettes and the conspirators went off into prolonged spasms of merriment over the probable results.

"Oh, Lord!" chuckled Bert. "What a stunt! Some poor fish will fall for it and probably write a mushy letter and maybe make a date. If he does—if he does, Miss Dorothy Carter will be there with bells on —what? And if some other fish—oh, gosh! Boy! That was an idea!"

II.

BERT'S experiment brought results much sooner than he expected. It was a matter of four weeks or thereabouts when a letter came for Miss Dorothy Carter. Even at that, Bert was surprised; he had almost ceased to keep an eagle eye on the morning post. Now he read the missive in high glee:

> 7 Blank Street, Trenton, N. J.
>
> DEAR MISS CARTER:
>
> I almost wrote "Dorothy." I like that name. Anyway, I'm glad to know that you're a good scout. I sure got a surprise when I had smoked my way down to the nice little note you sent.
>
> It was almost like getting a letter from you, and I'd like to know you. I don't go to New York very often, but some time when I do go, would you meet me some place if I let you know?
>
> I'm holding down a pretty fair job here, and I guess I could show you a good time. We could go to dinner and a show and supper or anything you like. Let me know if you get this, and I'll write again. Tell me something about yourself and I'll do the same.
>
> Sincerely,
> THOMAS FAY.
>
> P. S.—I'll bet you're a little devil. Are you? Ha, ha!

Bert bore his trophy to the office where he and Jack devoted their lunch hour to the composition of a reply. They viewed their effort with high satisfaction.

> DEAR TOM:
>
> You see, I call you "Tom" so that you will feel free to address me as Dorothy next

time. I'm so glad you like my name because it's the only one I have.

You want me to tell you something about myself. Well, Tom, there isn't much to tell. I'm nineteen and a blonde, and my friends tell me I'm not bad looking.

But, you see, Tom, I get bored sometimes putting cigarettes into boxes all day, year in and year out, and once in a while I have to "cut loose" and do something like putting that note in with the smokes. I'm glad I did it, too, Tom. Your letter sounds like you were a good sport and if you get a chance to come to New York, I'll meet you like a shot—anywhere you say.

What you said about dinner and a show and supper sounds good to me and shows that you're no tightwad like a lot of fellows I know. So try to come over soon, that is, if you're not all snarled up with another skirt. If you are, don't answer this letter.

Affectionately yours,

DOROTHY CARTER.

P. S.—You can typewrite swell. I wish I could.

Bert had paved the way for the postscript by purposely making a number of errors. What would be regarded more natural than that a girl from the packing room should sneak in and use one of the office typewriters during the noon hour? Yes, indeed, the letter was a work of art.

III

THE response came promptly. It breathed of eagerness for the meeting which had been suggested by Tom and approved by the party of the second part. Tom, it seemed, was coming to New York at the end of the following week. Would Dorothy meet him, and if so, where?

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" shouted Jack when Bert showed him the missive. "Now, what's the best way to put the bee on this Trenton bimbo?"

"We'll both go," declared Bert. "And we'll watch him flop around for about an hour. Then, just when he's ready to give up, we'll land on him. Make him buy us a cigar or something."

"Great!" agreed Jack.

Together they worked out another masterpiece. Dorothy would be "tickled pink" to meet Mr. Fay. She knew that Mr. Fay, being the sort of person he was, would want to meet her in a swell place. So how about the lobby of the Belmont? She would be just around the corner to the left as you come up the big stairway from Forty-Second Street. Please to let her know at once if that would be all right?

In order that there might be no mistake, Dorothy described her probable appearance—tan frock and brown straw hat, trimmed with light yellow. And so that she might identify Mr. Fay, would he please draw out a pack of cigarettes—Rajahs—soon after he arrived and pull out two, as if by mistake, replacing one of them when he saw his error?

In reply, Mr. Fay wrote:

Fine! That was a great idea, pulling out the cigarettes. Anybody might have a pack of Rajahs—I smoke them altogether—but he wouldn't be apt to take out two just at that particular time. You're a clever girly all right. Well—so long until Saturday night.

Nothing is more certain than that Saturday night will come if one waits long enough. Thus, we may as well skip the intervening days with each its quota of laughing anticipation, and follow Bert Frisbie and Jack Bundy up the gray marble steps of the Belmont at exactly six thirty-five on the evening in question.

They did not, however, turn to the left. Instead they sought a seat not far from the bookstall, one which commanded an unbroken view of all the territory which might be interpreted as, "around the corner to the left." They came early that they might not miss any tricks or fractions thereof.

Ninety minutes later they still sat there, their necks sore from much craning, their eyes tired from watching every male arrival in the hope of witnessing the magic signal. One man did, indeed, draw out a pack of Rajahs. But he extracted a single smoke quite neatly and showed no symptoms of expectancy.

"I guess we're stung," Bert reluctantly admitted. "He's probably laughing right now at having 'stood up' a fresh kid. Serves us right, too. We'd had him pulling out two cigarettes every three minutes for an hour, if he had come. He's wise, all

right. Takes no chances with the dames. Probably thought she'd let him down anyway."

"It might be funny," said Jack ruefully. "Only it's Saturday night and the evening's half gone. If we want a cigar we'll have to buy it ourselves. And we haven't anything to do."

"I know it," Bert returned disgustedly. "We'll write that gent a letter that'll make his hair curl. Let's go out in the street, anyway. See what turns up. No use wasting any more time here." And out they sailed.

IV.

Every tough experience has its recompense. That which has just been described was no exception.

It was as they emerged from the portals of the Belmont that they came upon the two girls. To Jack goes the credit of the discovery. He pinched Bert's arm, whispered: "Pipe the two skirts. Good lookers, both of 'em. I think one of them gave me the glad eye just now."

They took the trail, kept a little behind their quarry. The latter strolled idly in the manner of girls who are at a loss what to do with themselves. Yet, by their carriage and mode of dress, Bert knew that they were not of the street-girl type. In the traffic holdup at Fifth Avenue, the pursuers came alongside.

The girl next Bert was startlingly pretty, he thought, and his courage began to ooze. But at that moment, he imagined he caught a flicker of amusement in her brown eyes. So he remarked in a conversational tone: "Haven't lost your way, have you, Ethel?"

The girl half drew away, glanced at him and said: "No, we haven't. And you haven't lost your nerve, either. My name isn't Ethel, anyway, freshie!"

"Pardon me," said Bert, lifting his hat in mock courtesy. "My mistake."

"I guess you're making a mistake, all right. What do you take us for?"

Bert put on his particularly serious look, frequently used to good advantage on such occasions.

"Honestly," he countered, "I didn't mean to be fresh. But my friend and I were just wandering about, wondering how to kill time and we thought—you see—" Bert began to flounder.

The girl finished: "You thought you'd pick us up and look us over."

"Oh, no. I wouldn't put it that way. But why don't you be nice and come to a movie with us—or go and have an ice cream or—whatever you like. How about Coney Island?"

By this time both girls were obviously hesitating and—well, why go into detail? Two decent young men. Two equally decent young girls. Nothing to do. All looking for a mild lark. The answer is the usual one. The prerogative of twenty-one.

Amy Ripley and Bess Wilson were their names. And when the big bus deposited the four at Times Square somewhere around one o'clock, so much progress had been made that Bert took Amy to her home on Washington Heights, while Jack accompanied Bess to the Bronx.

V

At the logical powwow over the events of the evening, which took place in the office Monday morning, Bert said: "It's a darn good thing that bird did let us down Saturday night. I'll say those two kids are all right! The Ripley jane certainly is a pip—not at all the kind you'd expect to start something with on the street. I'm for her every time."

"Oh! They're a couple of fine girls," returned Jack. "I'm dated up for the pictures to-morrow night with Bess."

"So! You call her Bess already, do you?"

"Well, what do you call the one you had? Miss Ripley?"

"M'm," murmured Bert. "You needn't be so cocky. I got a date, too. Only mine's to-night."

"Bess works in the telephone company."

"Amy's got a good job in an office in Wall Street."

"Say, what about shooting a nasty letter at that Fay guy?"

"I think he did us a favor, but we may as well."

Scathing and sarcastic was the communi-

cation which the United States mail bore to Trenton that night. And back came an answer which was far from polite. It ran in part:

> Say! You're some kidder, girly. But I've got your number. You're razzing me on the chance that I didn't show up myself. Well, I did. And hung around plenty, too. Try a new line.

To which peevish offering, the conspirators replied thus:

MR. THOMAS FAY,
7 Blank Street,
Trenton, N. J.
DEAR SIR:
Blah! DOROTHY CARTER.

Except for having been instrumental in bringing about the meeting with Amy and Bess, the incident passed into unremembered history.

VI.

MANY times Bert thanked his lucky stars that he had sent that silly note away in the box of cigarettes. Certainly he did every time he looked at Amy Ripley. He often shuddered at the thought that otherwise he might have missed finding her at all. Love is a serious matter—at twenty-one.

He often wondered if Amy realized just how serious it was. When he looked into her liquid brown eyes or at the curve of her cheek or the shape of her nose he knew that he couldn't live without her! She stood out among all the girls he had ever known—or seen, for that matter—as a peony in a bed of pansies. She was so beautiful that sometimes his aspiratio s frightened him.

He wished that she wouldn't be so casual, that she wouldn't treat him as if he was —was—just a "fellow." She must *feel* that he adored her, that he would go through fire at the crook of her dear little pink finger. He was perfectly certain that, among all the great loves of history, there was not one so—well, so utterly unselfish as his.

And that's the way it was when she played him a mean trick. In the first flush of his anger, that was what he called it—*mean!* Afterward, he came to realize—well, you know how those things are—

For two months or more, he had seen Amy, on an average, four times a week. He had bought her more than twenty pounds of candy, had taken her to five plays and seventeen movie performances. They had sat side by side over some thirteen miles of scenic railway at Coney Island, had consumed altogether, eight broiled lobsters and thirty-six "hot dogs." And if, after that, he wasn't entitled to call her—yes, to look upon her—as "his girl," why, he ought to be set down as a dumb-bell!

And here she had gone and made a date with him for a Sunday afternoon; then, when he called for her, he found a message waiting for him to the effect that: "Amy said to tell you she had to go out. She won't be back till late."

"But—but—" he had stammered. Only to be told by the young and impudent sister: "That's what she said. That's all I know."

He had stumbled away from the house with pain and fear and anger splitting it three ways. And had sulked for a solid twenty-four hours. Then he had telephoned her, fully intending to be nasty and sarcastic, but she had beaten him to it with: "Oh, Bert! I was *so* sorry about yesterday. But an old friend of mine came suddenly and I just had to go out. Went to a gorgeous party at Pelham. I tried to get you but you'd left the house when I called up."

Bert had mumbled something or other and ended by grudgingly suggesting the movies that night. Amy would be delighted, she told him.

When they set out together, Bert was still nursing his grouch. Amy was the same as ever, cordial, bright and chatty. But he was disturbed and her good humor disturbed him all the more.

Why hadn't she told him whom she had gone out with yesterday? Who was this "old friend," anyway? And the more he mulled it over, the deeper became his gloom and the more pronounced his taciturnity.

The explosion came on the way home. Amy ventured: "What's the matter Bert? Anything wrong?"

"What would be wrong?" he parried, through set teeth.

"How should I know. But whatever it is, there's no use taking it out on me. You've spoken hardly a word all evening."

"Well. How can you expect me to be merry and bright when—when—you—?"

"When I *what?*" Amy showed signs of bristling.

Bert's anger flared. "That's it! Always the way with girls! Pull a dirty trick and then don't know what they've done!"

Amy stopped short, grasped Bert's arm and drew him around so that he faced her. "What do you mean, Bert Frisbie? And what right have you got to talk that way to me, anyhow? Do you *dare* stand there and accuse me of playing you a mean trick?"

"Well, you broke our date yesterday, didn't you?"

"Yes. I did. And I explained why I broke it!"

"But you didn't tell me what—who—"

"Look here, Bert Frisbie! Do you think I'm going to go into every detail of what I do and where I go and whom I go with? If you do, you're very much mistaken! I'll have you understand here and now that I shall do exactly what I please and go where I like and that I shall not make a report to you about it, either! Does that sink in, Mr. Smart Aleck?"

"All right!" Bert thundered. "Do as you please! If you want to go double-crossing me, I don't care. If you get any fun out of it. But you needn't expect me to hang around just to be a convenience for you. To be picked up and laid down when you happen to feel like it!" He was aghast at his own recklessness but he was in too deep to back out now.

Amy was white with anger.

"Hang around!" she repeated, "you bet your life you won't hang around! Not where I am! You can go now! And carry this bit of info with you. I went out yesterday with an old friend, as I told you. His name is Mr. Thomas Fay and he lives at No. 7 Blank Street, Trenton, N. J. Furthermore, *he* is a gentleman! Now laugh that off. And good night *Mr.* Frisbie!"

Before Bert could recover from the shock, she had walked quickly down the street toward her home, only a few doors away.

VII.

For all of two days, by a tremendous exercise of will power, Bert kept his lips tight set. If he began to waver, the thought of Thomas Fay came, bringing fresh determination.

Thomas Fay, indeed! So that bird was the kind Amy trained with, was it? A cheap flirt! Who wrote to any old girl who would give him her address! And Amy would throw down a chap like himself for a piece of cheese like Tom Fay! Ha! He'd show her!

Oh, yes. He'd show her. At noon of the second day following the row, Bert called Amy on the telephone. "Going to be home to-night?" he asked in a brave effort to blink what had happened.

"No," she said. "Nor any other night. Good-by!" The receiver clicked and that was that—

But that did not prevent the lamb leading himself to the slaughter at eight-thirty that evening. And it is no way astonishing that, the lamb having been properly dealt with and reduced to a state of utter helplessness, Amy consented to forgive him—at least take him back on probation. So Bert was able to sleep when he retired just after midnight—

Everything ran along swimmingly up to the night of the Washington Heights Social Club annual dance. For weeks, Bert and Amy had looked forward to the event with keen anticipation. Some party—it was going to be!

Then, at the last moment, Bert was hooked to get out a couple of involved statements at the office. He fumed and cursed inwardly. Which got him nowhere. The best he could do, finally, was to arrange that Amy should go on with Bess and Jack while he would come along as soon as he could finish his task. So that it was eleven-thirty before he entered the ballroom.

He looked about eagerly for Amy; discovered her in the arms of a tall, damnably good-looking chap. Both were laughing

and there was something in the way Amy glanced up into her partner's eyes that stabbed Bert to the heart and at the same time drove him wild with rage. Amy saw him as she passed, called out, "See you later," and was gone.

The few minutes which intervened before he captured her as she turned away from the refreshment table with a laughing good-by to her late companion, sufficed for Bert to get a grip on himself. He must not take any chances of another fight. But he must know who that man was. Therefore, he inquired with creditable calmness: "Who is the chap you were dancing with?"

"That," said Amy, hesitating just a little, "was Tom Fay."

With a mighty effort Bert kept his self-control. But all through the dance with Amy, the storm brewed. At the least, he would give this interloper to understand that he (Bert Frisbie) had Mr. Thomas Fay's number! He'd watch his chance.

The opportunity—and its accompanying trouble—came soon enough. Near the end of the intermission, Bert discovered his adversary standing alone in a corner of the anteroom. He made his way thither instantly. He was not looking for a fuss; he would waste no time or words. A tip to Fay ought to be enough.

Bert's tone was businesslike enough for the most fastidious as he touched Fay's elbow and said: "I just want to give you a friendly tip. Keep away from my girl!"

The other turned and surveyed Bert coldly. "And who, may I ask, is your girl? Who are *you*, for that matter?"

The blood flew to Bert's head. His hand itched to strangle this insolent Fay person. He'd had enough trouble on account of him already.

So he snapped: "You'll find out who I am soon enough if you don't let Amy Ripley alone!"

Fay laughed. "Is *that* so?" he drawled. "So Amy's your girl, is she?"

"You bet she is! *And she's no Dorothy Carter, either!*"

"Dorothy Carter?" pursued Fay. "Never heard of her?"

"You're a liar," Bert told him promptly. And the battle was on—

Bert half dodged his opponent's first blow; swung a nasty right to the jaw. Then he heard rather than felt the impact of Fay's fist on his own. They mixed so violently that a referee would have been hard put to it for a ruling on fouls. The ball turned into a riot.

Some one lost his head, blew a police whistle and fifteen minutes later both participants found themselves glaring at each other along the railing before the desk at the local police station. They were gory and decidedly the worse for wear—

"Disorderly conduct, fighting in a public place," the patrolman parroted.

The leisurely sergeant wrote it down.

"Name, please," he addressed Bert.

At that moment there was a commotion at the entrance. Jack and Bess and Amy, accompanied by half a dozen others from the hall, guided by the door attendant, crowded before the desk.

"Well, what's all this about?" growled the sergeant.

"The young lady here," indicating Amy, "says she can explain," said the attendant.

The sergeant looked at Amy. She was white-faced and her lips trembled. But she held herself bravely as she met the eyes of the man behind the desk. He observed her steadily for a few seconds, then said: "What is it you think you can explain? You're not going to tell me that these boys haven't been fighting; that one of 'em had the nosebleed and the other was trying to stop it?"

"Oh, no," said Amy, breathlessly. "I wanted to explain what they were fighting about. It was all a joke."

"Looks like it," commented the sergeant dryly, surveying the two principals. Both Bert and his antagonist were staring at Amy. They moved forward as if to speak, but the sergeant silenced them. "Keep still. Now go ahead, young lady."

"You see," went on Amy, "it began when I found a note in a box of cigarettes—my brother's cigarettes. That boy there," she pointed to the supposed Fay, "is my brother. He works at the pottery in Trenton, you see. Well, I read the note; it was from somebody who signed as 'Dorothy Carter' and the address was given.

"Well, I thought it was funny and showed it to Bess, my friend here, and we wrote a letter which we signed Thomas Fay. Just for a lark, you see. I had my brother mail it and gave his address. But he didn't know what it was all about. And I asked him to send me any letters that came for Thomas Fay; told him it was just a joke but didn't explain.

"Bess and I wrote and made a date to meet this Dorothy Carter at the Belmont. We wanted to see what she'd do. Just for fun, Captain. But she never showed up and we met Mr. Frisbie here and his friend just as we were leaving. They seemed so nice that we went to Coney Island with them.

"When I gave Mr. Frisbie my address, he wrote it down on the back of an envelope. And I saw Dorothy Carter on the other side of it and recognized the letter as the one we'd written. Then I saw through the whole thing. He had sent that note and signed a girl's name to it. I was sure, when he told me where he lived; the address was the same.

"So just to have some fun with him, one night I told him I had been out with a Mr. Thomas Fay of Trenton and we had a scrap. And to-night, at the dance, I saw that he was angry with me for dancing with my brother, so when he asked who my brother was, I told him Thomas Fay. How they got to fighting, I don't know."

She did not see the twinkle in the sergeant's eye as he said, sternly: "Well, I guess you'd better come to court in the morning. I'll have to lock 'em up now."

Amy burst into tears. "Oh don't! Please don't!" she begged, then ran to Bert's side and took his hand. "Don't do it. It would be such a disgrace—and—and—we're engaged!"

Bert gasped. Young Ripley stared. The sergeant cleared his throat and said: "I don't know but I ought to lock you two girls up on a charge of using the United States mails to defraud the other kind of males or something like that. But it's too much trouble to look up the statute. Turn 'em loose, officer—"

It was only a short time later when Bert demanded: "Amy, why did you say that we were—that we were—"

"I just said that so he would let you out," Amy replied. But Bert did not miss the swift rise of color to her face.

"Yes! You did!" he cried and dashed in pursuit as she fled for the shelter of her front door—

THE END

THE SCANDAL

ONCE I met a sweet and dainty female on a train—
Such a charming little woman; and she set my heart athrill.
I'm a staid and married hombre, theoretically sane,
Yet that stranger's bold advances found me flirting, with a will.

Ere we'd gone a goodly distance she was sitting on my lap—
Yes, indeedy! In the day coach where the other pilgrims were.
Yet they didn't seem to rate me as a home-destroying chap,
And they didn't look indignant o'er the shamelessness of her.

For the dainty little woman who had won the heart of me
With her smiling and her wiling and her sweet, seductive way,
Was a rosy, dimpled maiden who had reached the age of three,
And myself a harmless grandpapa with hair of silver gray.

Strickland Gillilan.

The Wily Tumtum

By HERMAN HOWARD MATTESON

TUMTUM LANE was packing up. Kizzy Mann, the girl who owned the island, had ordered Tumtum to vacate the shack, get off the island and stay off.

But Mr. Lane hadn't been nicknamed "Tumtum" for nothing. Tumtum is the Puget Sound Indian word which means "heap smart." Brains are bestowed upon a man to use. Tumtum's wits were working. He knew of a way to get good and plenty and *hiyu* even with Kizzy Mann. Just wait.

Tumtum had been thinking hard all day, ever since Kizzy had served the surprising notice of eviction. By noon Tumtum had his plan of revenge worked out in the rough.

Now, while he was packing his blankets, the coffee pot and the skillet into a soap box, he was polishing and perfecting the fine details of the scheme to get even with Kizzy. And the plan would work, without a doubt.

It would break poor Kizzy's heart and spirit, shame her forever before the people of the San Juan Islands.

The soap box packed, Tumtum carried it down to the beach. Night was coming on. It was time Billy Mann was returning from the errand upon which Tumtum had sent him.

Billy Mann, Kizzy's weak, wabbling younger brother, who listened to the counsels of Tumtum rather than of his sister, was going to be a mighty important wheel in Tumtum's machinery of revenge.

Tumtum, pacing back and forth upon the beach awaiting the return of Billy Mann, suddenly jerked his head about. The sound of an engine exhaust came floating over the placid bay. But this was a heavy duty engine, slow, ponderous. Billy Mann was expected to return in a speed boat, with a fast, staccato exhaust.

The dim outline of a tug with a scow lashed alongside came into view around the point of the island. The tug and scow moved in, and the anchor dropped in the

portion of the bay directly below Kizzy's cabin.

Tumtum knew the tug all right. It belonged to Kye Kennedy. A year before, Kye and Tumtum had been partners, as precious a pair of worthless, thieving beachcombers as had ever infested Puget Sound. Then Kye had fallen under the influence of Kizzy Mann, had squared about, quit the shiftless ways of the beachcomber, was trying hard to be somebody. Billy Mann had told Tumtum that as soon as Kye had paid for the tug, which he had bought on contract, he and Kizzy were to be married. Kizzy Mann had reformed Kye Kennedy.

Reformed, hell! Tumtum laughed unpleasantly as he stood peering through the darkness at the tug and the scow alongside. In Tumtum's philosophy of life, nobody ever reformed. They might pretend to in order to put something across, but anybody would be crooked if he thought it would pay.

Tumtum, staring through the swiftly gathering darkness, began to wonder what was keeping Kye so long aboard his tug. Ordinarily, the instant that the hook hit the mud, Kye would have had the dinghy off the stern and would have been rowing ashore to see Kizzy. Tumtum wondered.

Five minutes passed. Tumtum could hear a sound as of hammering aboard the tug. Down the beach a distance an old dory and a skiff lay drawn up on the sands.

Tumtum shoved off the dory, climbed in, sculled the craft out noiselessly, approached the tug from the seaward side.

Edging silently up to the tug, Tumtum stood on a thwart and peeked in at a port light. He almost betrayed himself with a sudden grunted exclamation. What Tumtum saw through the port light instantly resolved him to widen his scheme of revenge, include his former partner, Kye Kennedy, and clean up the enemy all at one swoop.

Kye Kennedy, a giant of a fellow with a freckled face, was humming a glad little tune. Kye was a fellow who was hatches full of music. The way Kye could wrap those big, grab-hook fingers of his around a bunch of fiddle strings, or find the multitudinous stops on an accordion was a caution. Kye could get music out of almost anything.

Now Kye, obviously happy and content, was humming a tune as he worked. He had placed a dozen or so quart whisky bottles on the let-down table, and was engaged in filling the bottles from a five-gallon demijohn.

Kye watched a moment longer, shoved the dory away, cautiously sculled ashore. Reformed, hell! Kye Kennedy, so slick and mealy, was peddling out a little whisky at the log camps, fish camps, or the lime kiln, where he went to pick up the scows that he towed with his tug.

No wonder Kye Kennedy was able to buy a twenty-thousand-dollar tug. There's money in whisky these days. Tumtum knew.

Now, what would Kizzy Mann say to this, Kye Kennedy, the reformed, the immaculate, peddling booze, a traffic that Kizzy abhorred above anything else in the world? Things surely were breaking prettily for Tumtum Lane. Things usually do, for a man who has brains.

Now, having discovered the perfidy of Kye Kennedy, Tumtum was more anxious than ever for the return of Billy Mann. Half an hour passed. No sign of Billy. But Kye Kennedy, having no doubt completed the task of bottling his wares ready for sale, shoved the dinghy from the stern of the tug and rowed rapidly ashore.

As Kye's boat hit the gravel, he called out: "Oo-hoo!"

The cabin door flung open. Kizzy Mann, her trim figure garbed as nearly always in a long, enveloping apron, stood framed in the mellow light that poured from the neat living room. "Oo-hoo!" answered Kizzy.

Kye started on a trot up the slope. Tumtum who wanted to know what was going on between these two prospective victims of his revenge, ambled along behind; Kye had no more than closed the door after him and kissed Kizzy, when Tumtum's ear was plastered against the thin cedar wall of the rear of the cabin.

"I got my contract with the lime company," said Kye proudly. "I got the first scowload of quick lime alongside my tug

right now. I'm to haul three scows of lime a week. The pay will more than take care of the installments on the tug. I'll have three days left for odd jobs, fish tows and the like. Hain't that great, Kizzy? In no time now, I and you—"

"It's fine, Kye," interrupted Kizzy. "But I'm just worried sick—about Billy."

"What's the pukpuk with Billy?" demanded Kye, his tone of voice not in the least amiable. "What's he went and done?"

"I know that Billy is thinking of going into the whisky business with Tumtum and Cannonball Barr. I'm ashamed to death to say it. But I know it's so. I've seen Cannonball in here two three times talking to Tumtum and Billy. And Billy hain't looked me fair in the eye for a week.

"This morning I marched down and I told Tumtum to roll his blankets and *klatawo,* and stay. Billy seen me coming and hid out somewhere. An hour afterward, when I'd come back to the cabin here, I saw Billy put out in a dory. I climbed the hill, watched him through my spy. He headed that dory straight for Smuggler's Cove, Cannonball's hangout. Oh, Kye, you got to help me, just got to."

Kizzy began to cry. The listening Tumtum could hear the giant tugman making awkward but sincere endeavor to comfort her.

"Kye, I just know Billy is going to booze running with Tumtum. Billy'll get caught, sure as tides. The disgrace—I rocked that boy in a soap box cradle. You just got to help me, Kye."

"What you want me to do, Kiz?" asked Kye.

"You got to find Billy, hog-tie him, snub him fore and aft, keep him from going in on the deal. I want you to head out for Smuggler's Cove, find Billy, fetch him home. I want you to see Cannonball Barr, and tell him he just better not take my little brother into no booze game."

"Why, sure, Kiz, I'll do that. I'll see Cannonball and I'll make endeavors to explain that if he gets Bill into any whisky racket, why, I and him will mingle. The very minute I get back from hauling my first scow of lime to Anacortes I'll look in on Cannonball. I'm due to weigh out of here about midnight when the tide's fair. I can be back from Anacortes along about noon to-morrow."

"No, Kye, I want you to see Cannonball now, right away, this very night. To-morrow may be too late. Why, Kye, when I was up the hill with my spy I made out plain as plain the Eagle boat that chases hooch runners laying off Waldron Island. That Eagle might pick Billy up this very night. I want you to go now, and see Cannonball, find Billy and fetch him home."

"Oh, I can't do that, Kiz. I made my contract to haul this lime. Think what that means, Kiz. Why, in no time I and you will have the tug paid, and be heading for Friday Harbor where licenses is got, and preachers lay hove to handy in the offing. I can't fall down on my very first scow of lime for Billy, or no one else."

"You think more of that lime job and that old tug than you do of me," sobbingly protested Kizzy. "What's a scow of lime, alongside of disgrace and a busted heart? If you don't go now, save Billy, why, it's the last thing ever I ask of you, Kye Kennedy."

"I think you're terrible unreasonable, Kiz," argued Kye. "I—"

"Oh, you do, do you? Here."

Tumtum could hear Kizzy speed across the floor, tear open a cupboard door. "Here," she said. "You made me your business manager in the tug. I've paid the bills, tended to everything for you. I resign. Here's all the papers and what money they is. I resign."

"You mean, Kiz, you just resign managing the tug? You don't mean you resign—on that other deal—I and you going to Friday Harbor where licenses and preachers is?"

"But I do."

"All right, Kiz. I'm terrible sorry."

The door opened. Tumtum, crouching back in the shadows, could see the troubled, stricken face of Kye Kennedy as he came from the house, one hand thrusting a mass of papers into the pocket of his tarpaulin coat.

Kye moved slowly down the slope, got

into his dinghy and rowed out to the tug. Tumtum listened a moment longer at the wall. Kizzy had evidently flung herself face downward on the couch, was sobbing heartbrokenly into a pillow. Tumtum moved also down the slope and took up his station beside the box containing his belongings.

Still Billy Mann had not returned. And Kye's tug and tow were in the bay where they would remain until tide turn at midnight. Tumtum renewed his pacing of the beach, perfecting his enlarged plan for getting good and *hiyu* even with both Kizzy and Kye.

But what was keeping Billy Mann? Upon Billy's return immediately depended the success of the whole scheme.

Then, suddenly, a circumstance not at all comprehended in Tumtum's system of strategy, occurred. Kizzy Mann came running down the slope, shoved off a skiff, leaped in and picked up the oars. With purposeful skill and supple strength, she shot the boat toward the middle of the bay.

But she wasn't heading toward Kye's tug, as the watchful Tumtum had at first suspected. The phosphorescence in the water, animated by the dip of the oar blades, showed to the wily, smart man ashore that the girl had headed right on past the tug, and was making toward the north shore of the island.

This was bad, bad. In an instant the astute mind of Tumtum gathered that Kizzy Mann, a highly resolute young lady, denied the help of Kye Kennedy, had herself resolved to row to Smuggler's Cove, interview Cannonball Barr and prevent her brother engaging in the booze running. What if Kizzy going should meet her brother Billy returning?

This fear was happily dissipated a moment later. The speed boat came tearing into the bay, and from the south. Kizzy was rowing around the north of Swan Island, headed toward Smuggler's Cove, while the speed boat returning from the cove had fortunately chosen the route to the south.

Fine. It would be quite some time now before Kizzy would see her brother. And very little satisfaction would she obtain from any interview she might have with Cannonball Barr.

Tumtum stood in the shallow water and whispered hoarsely to Billy to come on in easy. Billy nosed the prow of the speeder onto the sands, shoved the dory that he had in tow ashore. Tumtum picked up the box, stepped into the dory and hauled himself alongside the speed boat.

"What kept you so long?" demanded Tumtum.

"Oh, they wasn't no hurry. Cannonball said he'd have a supply boat into the cove about one or two o'clock. He wants us to start about four o'clock with our cargo for Muckilteo. He aims to give us five hundred dollars apiece if we make it safe. Then he wants we should run a couple of cargoes a week."

"That hain't bad," conceded Tumtum. "Now, you just leave the managing to me, Billy. I figure I'm leastways half smart. We'll make this trip together to-night to get the lay. Then we can spell each other, you take a trip one night, I take it the next. Now, I hain't going into no details. It hain't necessary. But I got things fixed. I'll show you to-night we can make these trips safe like in a church. It takes headwork to fix things. You leave it to me. You say Cannonball wants us to start about four o'clock?"

"Yes. He figures that's the safest time. We'll be through the islands then where the Eagle boat is lurking around before it gets light. Then we'll go through Swinomish Slough, and Cannonball says no one won't pester us."

"If we don't start till four, they hain't no hurry," said Tumtum relievedly. Tumtum was thinking that he would prefer to arrange the voyage to Smuggler's Cove so as to avoid meeting Kizzy.

"We'll just camp down here comfortably awhile, Billy," he added. "No hurry about starting."

Billy glanced apprehensively toward his sister's cabin. "I'd feel safer somewhere else," he said. "If Kizz was to come rampaging down here—"

"She won't," rejoined Tumtum confidently. "I got that fixed, too."

For an hour and a half the novitiate

booze runners sat in the speed boat. And still Kye Kennedy's tug and tow remained in the bay. Kye was waiting for tide.

From time to time, snatches of faint music came across the waters from the tug.

"Listen to that music, Billy. That's Kye Kennedy. He's singing, or playing something. The tune is Nellie Gray. I know Kye like a book, I and him went Siwashing around two years together. Kye is all broke up. Hear that tune. 'I'll never see my darling any more.' Kye is all stove about something."

Tumtum chuckled merrily to himself as only a man can laugh who has some diverting secret.

"We might as well be starting," he said finally, estimating that Kizzy had had time to row to the cove, discover that Billy was not there and start for home again.

Billy made as if to shove the dory ashore.

"Don't beach her, Billy," admonished Tumtum. "We need that dory again for a little something. You just watch and leave me manage."

A little puzzled, Billy made the painter of the dory fast to the stern cleat. The speed boat started up, and Tumtum laid a course to the north of Swan Island. With the tide now approaching the turn, Kizzy would surely return by the route south of the island.

In spite of the drag of the heavy dory, the speed boat made marvelous time. In a very few minutes the craft was off the west shore of Orcas Island. Tumtum brought the boat to a stop and began peering into the darkness in the direction of Waldron Island.

"She's there, what I'm looking for," he reported. "I just seen some swab on deck light a cigarette. It's the Eagle boat, the rum chaser. I told you I was a fixer, Billy. You watch me. You lay to here in the speed boat. I'm going to run over to the Eagle in the dory. You watch me."

Billy gave a surprised grunt. He had heard how the whisky runners bribed the officials and got by with their traffic scot free. It paid big to be partners with a brainy and nervy man like Tumtum.

Tumtum got into the dory, rowed across the channel, edged in to the sea ladder of the Eagle. A hand on watch challenged Tumtum, then, following Tumtum's whispered communication, summoned a lieutenant.

"What do you get for giving up a booze boat?" asked Tumtum.

"Half the value of the captured boat," said the officer.

"A tug and a scow of lime will be in Peavine Pass around one o'clock," said Tumtum. "You'll find booze aboard. The lime is a blind. I get half what the tug is worth?"

"Yes, if it has whisky aboard we confiscate and sell the boat. You get half."

"Little later, I'll put you on where you can pick up a fine speed boat," said Tumtum. "But that'll be later. Don't miscue on that tug and scow. You'll find the booze."

Tumtum shoved away, rowed back to the speed boat.

"I got it fixed," he told Billy. "We can run that carge to-night safe like we're in a church. We'll anchor the dory here, pick it up later."

The dory was anchored, and the speed boat made toward Smuggler's Cove.

Arriving at the cove, a deep indentation in the rocky island, a ramshackle salmon cannery along one side, Tumtum and Billy ran the speed boat in under the overhanging edge of the cannery dock. Making the craft fast, they climbed out onto the wharf and made their way down the latter toward a shack where a light flickered out about the edges of a drawn curtain.

Tumtum was peering about anxiously. There was no sign of a boat, such as Kizzy had made the trip in. If she had been there, she was gone. Tumtum breathed easier.

A knock at the shanty door elicited a hoarse, "Come in." Cannonball Barr sat at a rude, home made table, contemplating a brown quart bottle that stood before him.

Cannonball, a giant, reputed the dirtiest fighter on Puget Sound, welcomed his recruits with alcoholic fervor. He had a beak of a nose that had got a bad skew to starboard in some of his cat fights, as the rough and tumbles are known among the beach

combers. This crooked nose, a pair of deep-set, cunning eyes, a peaked head and two stingy ears made up the portrait of Mr. Cannonball Barr.

"Come on in," he welcomed his callers. "Derrick a couple drinks into your hatch. You'll feel better."

Tumtum and Billy entered the cabin. "You had anybody—any callers to see you, Cannonball?" asked Tumtum, giving his chief a warning wink to answer advisedly.

"Nobody been here to-night," said Barr. "I'm expecting my supply boat with a thousand cases good hooch any time. But nobody been here. Why?"

Tumtum shook his head. So Kizzy hadn't been to see Cannonball. That meant in Tumtum's interpretation that she might still arrive. Tumtum's plans weren't working out as smoothly as he had expected. It would be awkward to have Kizzy Mann arrive about the time the supply boat was in, and the two new rum runners were just loading their cargo.

Tumtum snatched a hasty drink and walked out upon the wharf, leaving Barr and Billy to nurse the bottle. Tumtum would have to welcome Kizzy, tell her some fantastic lie and head her back for home. That might not prove so easy a task, for Kizzy had a mind of her own.

Tumtum walked to the seaward end of the dock, cocked his head to listen. A boat was coming, a powerboat though. The chug, chug of the engine was growing louder.

Tumtum ran back to the shack and flung open the door. "A boat is coming, Cannonball," he reported.

The giant booze king rose to his feet. "Must be my supply boat," he said.

Billy Mann, Tumtum and Barr walked down the wharf.

"That hain't my supply boat," exclaimed Cannonball in sudden alarm. "The exhaust is different. That hain't my boat. Billy, you run back to the shack and cache that bottle of booze. They's two more bottles in the cupboard. Ditch 'em all outside in the jungle somewhere. It might be some snoop coming in to look us over."

Billy sped away on his errand. The power boat came nearer and nearer. It was heading into the cove, but so dense was the darkness that Barr and Tumtum could not make it out until it almost touched the dock. Then they saw that it was a tug, with a large scow lashed alongside.

The tug rubbed the corner of the dock. An agile figure leaped to the planks, took a turn with a hawser about the cleat.

"Was you looking for somebody?" asked Cannonball, striving to make his gruff voice as amiable as possible.

"Yes, I'm looking for some one. Are you Cannonball Barr?"

"Yes, I'm Cannonball Barr."

"Well, I'm Kye Kennedy. I was ast to come here and have a *wawa* with you, and maybe make some war medicine. Like a bilge rat, I said I wouldn't. I got headed out into the bay, changed my mind and my course, and here I be. I'm after Billy Mann. I'm here likewise to serve word on you that if you continue coaxing this Billy Mann into the whisky game I and you will go to a head on. I mean it. If you connive any more with Kizzy Mann's brother I'll just naturally snatch the hull roof offen you and leave you plumb open to wind and weather. Do you *kumtux* that talk, Cannonball?"

"Oh, yeah," answered Mr. Barr, letting fall upon Kye's shoulder a hand the size of a small water butt. "I get it very clear. While you was speaking so ardent I was communing and meditating. I was thinking while you was going on how some folks suicides drinking moon whisky. Others shoots and stabs theirselves. Still others, the successfullest suicides in hist'ry, they go absolute pelton crazy in the head, like the Indians say, and front up to Cannonball Barr, and throws their war bonnet on the ground. But maybe now you wasn't aiming at committing sudden death. I generally always gives a man one chance to reconsider. I give it to you very free. You just caper back aboard your tug, and you p'int out, and throw her in high."

Kye Kennedy struck the hand of the whisky king from his shoulder.

"Don't try to terrify me none," he warned coldly. "You been drinking a little. You got a breath like the bilge of a cod

fisher. I don't like to rough handle cripples or drunks. You just say where Billy Mann is. He's the party I come after."

At the moment Billy Mann opened the door of the shack, appeared for a brief moment, three bottles cuddled under his arm.

"Why, that's Billy," exclaimed Kye, starting down the wharf. But again the heavy hand of Cannonball Barr fell swiftly, clutched into the tarpaulin-clad shoulder, and spun Kye about.

But as Kye spun he doubled a fist, let the long arm, to which the fist was fast, describe half of the arc of a considerable circle. Then the fist fell with a thud upon the side of Mr. Barr's head.

Barr went down, but sprang to his feet again as resilient as a rubber ball for all his bulk and for all his drink. The fight was on.

Tumtum, who, at the first sound of Kye Kennedy's voice, had slunk back into the shadows, plastered himself for safety's sake against the cannery wall. Billy Mann, who had cached the three bottles according to directions, came running down the wharf.

Kye and Cannonball clinched, fought free with flailing, wild blows that, for the greater part, missed their objective. Again they clinched. Cannonball struck for Kye's eyes with stiffened thumb, the dirtiest of beach comber fight tactics.

But Kye Kennedy was likewise formerly of that faith and ilk. When Barr struck a second time to blind him Kye fastened his teeth like a vicious dog into the thick of the booze-runner's thumb and sank them to the bone.

With a mad scream Barr tore free. He sent a smashing blow into Kye's face that almost ended things. Kye fell forward, resting upon hands and knees. As Barr flung himself upon the fallen man Kye struggled up, butting viciously with his head, uppercutting savagely with blows that found Barr's vulnerable midriff. Cannonball fell back against the wall, his spread hands striving to protect his battered face.

But Kye bored through that weak defense, got the whisky king about the waist and was jouncing the giant up onto his hip ready for a run at the wall with his kicking catapult when a sweet bell-like note tinkled in his brain, and he fell in a huddled heap, Barr atop. Tumtum, who had snatched the jackstaff from the speed boat, a hard wood stick an inch and a half in diameter, had rushed in from behind and had dealt Kye a treacherous blow on the back of the head.

Cannonball, now a murdering maniac, got to his feet, drew back a heavy sea boot, sent it crunching into Kye's ribs. But for Tumtum's interference, and the whimpering of Billy Mann, Cannonball would have kicked his victim to death.

"Not here, Cannonball, not here," counseled Tumtum. "It's murder. Not here."

Tumtum seized Barr by the arm. "Do you know what's in that scow?" he demanded. "It's lime, quick lime. You don't want nothing traced back to here, Cannonball."

Cannonball stood swaying slightly, his eyes blinking at the tug and the scow as he sought to gather his wits.

"Yeah, but what's the idea?" he asked hoarsely.

"It's easy," said Tumtum. "Heave Kye Kennedy back onto the deck of his tug. Shove tug and scow adrift. First, we'll pull a sea plug in the scow. You know what happens when the water creeps up to the false floor in that scow, touches them barrels of quick lime. It 'll be an accident at sea. Get the idea, Cannonball?"

With appalling blasphemy Cannonball gathered up the limp body of Kennedy and flung it upon the deck of the tug. Tumtum, prone upon the narrow deck of the scow, was feeling along the sides below water line for the sea plugs.

Finally he found one. In seeking merely to loosen the plug to allow a dribble of water to enter the scow, his hand slipped and he pulled the plug entirely out. A stream of water could be heard splashing into the scow.

"Quick! Shove her out! Shove her out!"

Tumtum and Barr set their shoulders against the scow and gave it a mighty thrust from the dock. Slowly the tug and the scow moved away toward the open end of the narrow bay. The back eddy caught

them. Then the swirling, powerful outer current got its grip upon both craft and spun them away into the darkness.

"Which way was your whisky supply boat coming from, Cannonball?" asked Tumtum, shoving Billy Mann, who was whimpering, back against the cannery wall. "Which way is she coming?"

"From Fraser River way. Why?"

"I was thinking. In no time the water will get that lime. There'll be a blow up and a fire. That fire might attract a lot of boats in here. Hadn't we better pile into the speed boat, tear out toward the Fraser, meet the whisky boat and have it put in somewhere else than here?"

"Good idea, Tumtum," commended Barr. "We don't want no torchlight procession when that booze boat comes in. Good idea."

Tumtum flung off the lines of the speed boat. Cannonball seized the sniveling Billy Mann, dropped him down into the boat and followed. Tumtum started the engine, and the craft shot out of the bay into the open, then headed to the north.

As the speed boat turned its sharp prow into the onrush of the tidal current Tumtum and Cannonball bent their gaze toward the south, into the abyss of darkness whither the flood was carrying the tug and the scow of lime. Billy Mann, moaning and whimpering, lay in the bottom of the boat, half hidden by the stern thwart under which he had tried to crawl.

There sounded a pistol shot crackling. A score of little spouting fountains of fire merged into a roaring confluence that flung its lurid light against the sky. The scow was a seething mass of flame.

As the wind waved the great scarlet plume back and forth the house of the tug caught fire. The figure of a man could be discerned tottering weakly about the deck. With his face shielded behind an upflung arm, Kye strove desperately to cast off the moorings that held the scow against the rail of the tug. The flames, veering to the wind, drove him to the shelter of the house.

Again he tried. The stern line was cast off. Then the bow. The tug floated free of the scow, but the pilot house was a mass of flames.

Looking back, Tumtum and Cannonball witnessed the plight of Kye Kennedy, but Barr only shoved the timer over a notch, urging the fleeing speed boat to its limits.

Now sounded astern of the speed boat the short, sharp tooting of a whistle. The Eagle boat ran up alongside the distressed tug. In an instant a stream of water from the Eagle's pump deluged the flaming pilot house. Almost immediately the fire on the tug was extinguished. But the scow continued to burn, the light illuminating the whole bay.

Some one shouted aboard the Eagle. The powerful searchlight on the house of the rum chaser thrust itself into the darkness like a great splay finger, felt about, centered its blinding rays upon the fleeing speed boat.

Sharp tootings of the whistle ordered the speeder to heave to, but she kept on. Now the Eagle was in pursuit, the fire roaring from its funnels, its tremendous wash thundering upon the rocks of the nearby shore. As swift as was the flight of the rum boat, swifter still was the pursuit of the Eagle.

A voice shouted from the little quarter deck of the latter. Cannonball Barr merely swerved the course of his boat and sent it straight toward the rocky shore where, he believed, the Eagle would not dare to follow.

Again a shout. A shot from the Eagle's one-pounder ricocheted along the water. A second shot nicked the coaming. A third plowed into the port side corner of the stern, glanced, tore the shaft from place.

In an instant the desperate Cannonball was over the side, swimming madly for shore, followed by Tumtum. Billy Mann remained crouched beneath the stern thwart while the boat slowly filled.

The Eagle continued in pursuit. A work boat was dropped from the davits, and Barr and Tumtum were hauled in urgently by means of boat hooks.

When the work boat put back and paused for an instant beside the sinking speeder the latter was devoid of passengers. Billy Mann had slipped over the side and swum quietly to shore.

On board the Eagle, Tumtum and Barr were brought before the captain. A lieu-

tenant stood by and greeted Tumtum with a grin.

"That's the fellow who told me about a booze boat that was to be in Peaviné Pass," said the lieutenant. "He is the one that said he would claim the reward for the tug, and for a speed boat later on."

The captain nodded and gave Tumtum a searching look.

"A certain young lady was aboard the Eagle when you called, and her skiff was hanging from our davits. She told us all about you, Tumtum. She assured us that you were a plain liar when you claimed that the tug boat you mentioned was running whisky. Any way, we had promised her to fetch her to Smuggler's Cove, extricate her brother from a bad tangle, and arrest Cannonball Barr. We were a little delayed. We had to stop and heave-to to a supply ship. We've got Barr's supply ship, with a thousand cases aboard. The skipper and crew weakened, said the whisky belonged to Barr."

Mr. Barr began to swear softly. At that moment the Eagle came alongside the tug. Kye Kennedy and Kizzy Mann were standing upon the deck together.

"Mr. Barr here will be glad to pay for that scow of lime and the damage to your tug," said the captain of the Eagle. "We'll see to it that he does pay. I shall also use my influence, if required, to square you with the company to which the lime was consigned. I can promise you that you will not suffer for this night's work."

"I tell you that swab is running booze," shouted Tumtum angrily. "You can't go and make no fool out of me. I tell you he's got booze aboard. I want him searched."

"All right, we'll search him," said the captain, stepping across the rail to the deck of the tug.

Kye Kennedy's face fell, and he began to fidget.

"I don't know what you want to search me for," he said. "Course, if you want to search, go to it."

Kizzy Mann came up beside Kye, gave him an anxious, an almost accusing look.

"You bet, search him," exulted Tumtum. "You'll find anyway a dozen quarts in his cabin, and some in a five gallon demijohn in the locker."

Kye Kennedy began to grin. "That's right, captain. Tumtum's got me where my hawser is slack. I might as well give up. Fetch a look, captain. And you too, Kizzy."

Kye led the way into the cabin and snapped on the light. On the let down table were twelve quart bottles, held in place by strips of wood nailed crisscross. Kye opened the locker and handed out a partially filled demijohn.

"I read into a book how a party could make a good zylophone by filling bottles with water, some fuller, some less, getting the true notes of a scale. In them bottles and that demijohn is water, plain water. Listen."

Kye Kennedy took a pair of little wooden hammers from a shelf, struck a double consonant note upon the bottles. Then he began hammering a lively little tune out of the bottles, humming, as he played, the words of a familiar doggerel song of the Puget Sound fishermen:

Oh, things hain't always what they seem,
Jim Lathrop ought 'a' knowed—
The cook stewed frogs' legs up in cream,
So Big Jim et a toad.

THE END

GREATER STORY CAMPAIGN

opens October 3rd in ARGOSY-ALLSTORY. Details will be found in our advertising pages where, from time to time, we will let you in on interesting forthcoming events in our program for the fall and winter. Tell your friends about this so that they may enjoy with you a real feast of fiction.

Outside the Schedule

By GEORGE C. JENKS

ANY man who has ever done it will tell you railroading is humdrum from the word go—just hard work, cinders, grease and being bawled out by the man over you when something goes wrong because he himself is a bonehead. No particular excitement in all that! Still, I'll have to admit that once in a while some little thing will turn up outside of the regular schedule which sticks in a fellow's memory.

Take it when I was helping to build the Canadian Pacific in 'eighty-five. I'd been a section hand on J. J. Hill's old Northern Pacific for quite a spell, when I heard they wanted men on the Canadian Pacific, which at that time had been built to a point some miles west of the forks of the Saskatchewan and was aiming for Kicking Horse Pass, where it would go through the Rockies into British Columbia.

I'd never been across the border, and here was my chance to give the big Canadian Northwest the once-over. It wasn't a hard job I struck, but it sure was lonesome. They were storing tools and other supplies along the right of way at intervals, to be used for branches when the main line would be finished, and at each of these points was a shack and a man on guard.

I was one of these guards. It was in a long ravine, with a pine thicket along the tops of the sloping banks, and rough country all around.

The only time I ever saw anybody was when the construction train came through twice a week. Other times there were the rocks and trees, and the coyotes howling at night, and the two rails stretching away in both directions, getting rusty already.

The train left me plenty of food and

tobacco, and I was comfortable enough in my shanty at night, with the door shut and my lamp going. In the daytime I'd walk up and down, looking at the wheelbarrows, spades, picks, boxes and other stuff, and thinking of what the boys on the construction train had told me—that there were Indians around who would steal anything they could get their hands on.

But it wasn't Indians only I'd have to look out for. Louis Riel and a mob of half-breeds were giving trouble to the government and might make a raid on the railroad at any time.

I'd heard of this bird Riel when I was working on the Northern Pacific. He was living in Montana then. But back in the seventies he'd raised a big ruction in Canada and come near being hanged. Now here he was again, at the head of another rebellion, with the Canadian army after him and all sorts of rumors flying about.

Leon Boudereau, the brakie on the construction train, who told me about it, seemed to think Riel might win out in the end. Boudereau was a French half-breed himself.

I didn't say anything, but I made up my mind that if any of this Riel outfit came fooling around me, trying to pinch Canadian Pacific property, they wouldn't get away with it without an argument.

It was when I'd been on the job a little over a week, and the lonesomeness of those rocks and trees and gullies, with the shadowy mountains in the distance, was getting on my nerves, that there came the darkest night I'd seen there. There was no moon, the stars were blotted out by drifting clouds, and the wind howled down the ravine with a mist of fine rain that made everything still blacker.

I was in my shanty, with a Winnipeg paper a week old, and when I looked up to glance at the window it was as black as if a shutter had been clamped over it. I kept on staring at the window without thinking about it while I lighted my pipe, *when suddenly a faint white streak cut through the blackness.*

My first thought—sort of instinct—was to turn out the lamp, so that whoever was outside couldn't follow my movements. I knew that the white streak was the light from a covered lantern, and that somebody was moving about in the dark, letting only a little light show, so that he could find his way.

If I'd turned out the lamp he would have known at once that I was on to him. Instead of doing that, I stooped, so that my head was below the window, and opened the door just wide enough to let me slip through.

As I stepped out to the open two hands grabbed each of my arms behind—and with a mighty strong grip, believe me!—and the light of a lantern was flashed in my face.

I could not see any one in the darkness, but I knew there were three men. Of course I made a plunge to break away. But with a man holding each arm and another ready to stop me if I did break loose, what could I do?

"What do you want?" I asked, keeping my voice down, so they wouldn't think I was scared.

Fact is, I *wasn't* what you'd call scared, but I was as mad as a wet hen.

None of 'em answered me, but I heard one say something that I reckon was French—or it might have been German or Italian, for all I know. Then one of the others came back with the same foreign lingo, and the next minute they were dragging me along down the track, stumbling over the ties and kicking against the rails as we went on in the pitch dark.

When we stopped some fifty feet from the shack, one of them threw the light of the lantern on four long boxes that had come on the train that morning, each of them having a big label saying they were to be opened only by the head engineer.

I had seen boxes like that pass through on the construction train, and I knew they were the kind used by engineers for carrying surveyors' instruments and similar contraptions considered too valuable to be lying around loose. But this was the first time any had been left in my care even for a few hours.

There was a handcar among other supplies that had come on the train, lying on the side of the right of way near the boxes, where it had been tipped over as it was

rolled off a flat car. The light of the lantern shone on it for a second. Then somebody punched me in the back and ordered me to "Lift!"

Did I lift? Sure I did!

We got the heavy handcar on the rails, and I was planted against one of the iron handle-bars belonging to the machinery that would send the car along by man-power. A cold ring at the back of my neck, the muzzle of a pistol, made me ready to obey orders right on the jump.

They opened up the lantern a little, and I saw there were six men altogether. I felt sure they weren't railroaders. They looked to me more like lumberjacks or cowboys, but I couldn't make out their faces because their big hat brims were pulled well down. They wore flannel shirts and no coats.

They worked fast, without talking, and in a few minutes the four boxes were loaded on the car and the five men who'd been handling them piled aboard. The fellow who held the pistol against the back of my neck did not move, but two of the others took the handle-bar opposite me and another man grabbed half of mine. The remaining two stood in front, one of them holding the lantern, but keeping it covered, and away we went, as fast as the four of us could pump, lickety-split into the darkness in the other direction from the way the railroad was pushing through the Rockies.

We did about six or seven miles as I figured it, and considering that the new roadbed hadn't had time to settle and was all shaky, and that any number of bowlders, broken tree-limbs and heaps of earth had a way of dropping on the track, where, of course, we couldn't have seen them in the dark, I was willing enough to pull up when the man with the lantern, who seemed to be the boss, gave the order to stop.

The four of us held back on the iron double crank to slow down, and I threw on the brake. As a railroad man the operation of a handcar wasn't strange to me. We came to a dead halt, and the man with the lantern jumped off, turning his light on the boxes.

"*Vite!*" he says, which I knew was French for "Make it snappy!"

At the same time, he and two others grabbed one of the boxes and dragged it off the car into the high grass at the side of the track.

We were in the middle of a wood, and the tree branches met overhead. It was as dark as a cellar except for the little light from the lantern.

It took only about two minutes to get three of the four long boxes off the car and into the brush at the side of the right of way. Then, as they were coming back for the last box, the man with the lantern said something short and sharp, and they all stopped to chew the rag something fierce.

I don't know much French, but I caught enough to savvy that they meant to bump me off, and were arguing about how it should be done.

I did some quick thinking. Where we had stopped the handcar was at the top of a grade running down in the direction we'd been going, further into the wilderness. They didn't talk long, and just as I saw two of the gang coming for me I released the brake and put all I had into the crank, setting the wheels going.

It wasn't easy for one to do the work of four men at that crank, but a man can develop a lot of extra strength when he's fighting for his life, and I made that old pump go so well that I got off to a runaway start, and with the grade getting steeper every minute I was a hundred yards on my way before they knew I was moving.

They all made a rush, but they were too far away, and I was going too fast for them to catch up. That is, I thought I was, until I made out one of the gang running at the back of the car and trying to pull himself on board behind me. Well, I smashed the heel of my boot on his fingers, and that was all of that.

When the fellow dropped off, swearing, I had a hunch that he might send a bullet after me. So I let go of the crank and laid myself down flat on the floor of the car.

It was going faster right along, and it wasn't necessary for me to pump. The grade was taking care of me. I could hear the iron crank pumping, but I couldn't see anything.

Where I was going I didn't know, but I aimed to get far away from those six men

who had stolen the three boxes. And all the time I was waiting for a shot from behind.

But it didn't come, and after a while I sat up, taking care to keep away from the iron handles as they worked up and down, and tried to make up my mind what I'd do when I got to the bottom of this long hill, where the car ought to come to a stop of itself.

I had run about two miles, as I calculated, and the car had swung around two rather sharp curves which might have thrown me off in the dark if I had been standing up, and still the grade didn't end. Then I made out a moving pin-point of light dead ahead, which got larger as I went on, till I saw it was a lantern swinging to me to stop.

Being already pretty well worked up over strangers getting in my way, I might have kept right on, only that I saw there were three or four men, and by the lantern light as I came closer I made out that they were in the uniform of the Canadian militia. I concluded I'd better slow down, and I slammed on the brake, grabbing at the crank at the same time.

The car had hardly stopped when two of the soldiers pulled me off, and one shoved the lantern into my face while the other felt me over—to find out whether I had a gun, I guess.

Well, I hadn't. Then things came so fast I can hardly tell just all that happened bit by bit.

"Where are the others?" asks one of the soldiers, who had chevrons on his sleeve.

"There ain't any others, sergeant," I says. "I'm Martin McCarthy, guard for the Canadian Pacific at Station Number Seven."

I had this much out when one of the other men pulled the long box forward on the car, and the sergeant, after telling me to "Shut up!" ordered the box to be broken open.

Two of the soldiers busted the lid with the butts of their rifles, and then I got a line on what all this fussing meant. The bunch who had made me take the handcar to that place in the woods with the four boxes were part of the rebel army—if you'd call it an "army"—of Louis Riel, the half-breed insurgent.

This one box was full of rifles, with boxes of cartridges stowed in among them, and of course the three boxes they had unloaded up there in the lonely place I'd run away from also contained guns and ammunition.

The sergeant was a suspicious devil, and he didn't let up on me when I told him my name and that I was a railroader.

"You may be all of that," he says, in a nasty way, "and still belong to this Louis Riel set of thieves. He's been recruiting everywhere, and you are not the only Canadian Pacific man working for him. You can't tell me you didn't know there were guns in those boxes. It's quite clear. I ought to have shot you down before you got off this handcar. My orders are to get every Riel man dead or alive, and the government would rather have 'em dead."

I felt that the sergeant was talking through his hat. I didn't believe he had any such orders. Still, here I was, in the woods of the Northwest, alone, and with a box of rifles that I was running away with, and it might easily give a bull-headed soldier an excuse to plug me.

All he'd have to say was that I was resisting arrest, or something, and that would be all about it. When it comes to military law in wartime, they don't split hairs. And I suppose they would call this half-breed rebellion, under Louis Riel, with talk of Indians joining in, a "war."

"Now, young fellow," says the sergeant to me, "you've been lying, and I reckon I'll take you to Winnipeg and let you explain yourself there. Meanwhile, we are going to get your pals. Our information is that there were four boxes of rifles. Where are the other three?"

He handed this question to me in such an ugly voice, with his chin pushed out and a big service revolver pointed at my chest, that I didn't keep him waiting for an answer—none whatever.

I told him there were six of Riel's men back in the woods two miles, and they had three boxes like this one that they had made me bring on my handcar from Station Seven. Then, while that iron-faced Cana-

dian sergeant held up the lantern so that he could watch my face and I could feel his dark eyes boring into me, I told him over again just how it came that I was on the handcar with the box of rifles.

"I don't believe you," he says. "But we'll go and see. Get to that crank."

They put the box back on the car, and three of the soldiers helped me to man the crank after I'd shifted the gears so that the car would run the other way, back up the two-mile grade I'd coasted down.

The sergeant doused his lantern and the four of us bent our backs to the crank. It ground my soul to have to push the car up that long hill, though I was willing enough to help get the Riel gang, to pay them for thumping me in the back and shoving a gun against my neck. So far as the argument between Louis Riel and the Dominion Government was concerned, I didn't know which side was in the right, and, as an American, it was none of my business anyhow.

It was awfully hard pumping up the hill. By the time we got around the first curve, where the grade was stiffer than below, I was about all in, and, judging by the way those three soldiers grunted and swore, they were as bad off as I was—perhaps worse. The sergeant had it easy. But he was an officer, and of course it was his right to sit there on the platform and tell us now and then to "Put more zip into that pumping!"

That sergeant may have been sitting easy. But he wasn't in any trance. He had the sharpest black eyes I've ever seen. As we went along he was drilling ahead into the darkness as if he could actually see something, though for anything I could make out I might as well have had my head in a sack.

It was when we had come to what I believe was the darkest part of the whole trip, where the tree-limbs and leaves were matted together overhead as solid as a house roof, that the sergeant suddenly cut loose with his six-shooter. All shut in, as we were, the bellow of that gun was something terrific, I'm telling you.

And that wasn't all of it. In a split second, and while the air was full of thunderous echoes, a flash and roar came out of the blackness on the right of the track, and, without speaking a word or letting out a whimper, the sergeant keeled over on the platform, all huddled up, with one loose arm falling across my feet.

I felt him quiver. After that he never moved.

We were all paralyzed for a moment. Then one of the three soldiers yells "Pump hard!" and we worked like fury to get ahead out of the ambush.

We'd made about a dozen yards, I should judge, when there was a horrible jerk, the roadbed seemed to rise under us, the car tipped over sideways, and I went flying into the blackness.

My head struck a tree and I felt dazed and half sick. Then, as I scrambled through the underbrush among the trees, three shots rang out, one after the other, and I saw a lantern bobbing about, with several men quite close to me.

Right away I knew they were the members of the Louis Riel outfit who had raided my station and made me bring those long boxes into the woods on the handcar. They were talking low in French, but, except for a cuss word from the man with the lantern. I couldn't tell what they said.

I believed I was safe for the time, hidden in the long grass, and I watched to see what the gang would do. The handcar was on its side in the shallow ditch along the right of way, and a bowlder on each rail explained why.

I counted the Riel men moving about. There were only five, instead of the six there had been. The sixth was lying quite still on the ground near the wrecked car. The sergeant had brought him down with that single shot of his, before he himself went into the Great Beyond with a bullet in his heart.

The five rebels tackled the handcar to put it back on the rails. They did it at last, and it looked as if the car was still in running order.

The boss, with the lantern, looked it over and gave a short order to the other four. Without answering, they carried the dead sergeant to the car and laid him out on the platform, where they put his hat over his face. Next they brought the three private

soldiers, who had helped me pump the car, and laid them in a row by the side of the sergeant, each with his hat covering his white face.

I knew now what those three shots had meant that I had heard while crawling through the underbrush.

I was so interested in what was going on that I got up on my knees to see what they'd do next. There was a grunted order and the whole five of them got behind the car and pushed it some little way down the hill. Then, when it had got up speed, they let it go, and away she went, tearing down that grade by herself as if she had an engine behind her.

If I hadn't been so blamed curious I might have saved myself all the trouble that came afterward. I'd been on my knees, but when they sent the car rushing down the hill with those four dead soldiers aboard I stood up to see better.

I might have known the light of the lantern was shining on me. But I didn't—until the boss gave a grunt and the four others rushed me before I could get set to beat it through the wood. They had me with my hands pinned behind and quite helpless all in a flash, and I found myself standing before the leader of the gang while he gave me the worst bawling out in mingled English and French before I could get my breath.

He believed I'd hunted up these soldiers to tell them where the Riel men were with the boxes of rifles. I explained that the soldiers had captured me, and that I had come back because they made me.

"You're a liar!" he says. "And it was you killed him." He pointed to the ground, and there I saw the bird who'd been plugged by the sergeant.

Of course I told him I hadn't done it—that I hadn't a gun, and that I was pumping the handcar when the shooting broke loose. All he said to that was to spit out "*Espion!*" in a sort of hiss, and I knew the word meant "spy," and that I was in a tight place for fair.

There was another short order, and they tied my hand behind me with willow ropes and began to shove me through the wood, with the leader ahead, carrying the lantern. I'd heard one of the lads call him "*Mon capitaine,*" and another say something about "Captain Maurice," so, when we'd been blundering through the wood for nearly half an hour, I got up nerve and spoke to him by name. I was so scared that I had to do something.

"Captain Maurice," I says, "you've got me wrong. I'm not taking any hand in this scrap between Louis Riel and the Canadian government. I'm an American, and I'm over here to earn my cakes and coffee by working for the Canadian Pacific. I didn't know what was in those boxes, and I have not killed anybody. Let me go, and I'll never say a word about seeing you. I'll have to say some one swiped the boxes; I can't get out of that. But I won't tell how it was done. And I'll take my solemn oath I ain't a spy. You know, captain," I goes on confidentially, "I'm a United States citizen, and if I should be hurt the whole American army will come over and just naturally—"

That was as far as I got. Some one handed me a crack on the bean with a pistol butt, and I walked on for a long time after in a sort of dream.

When I came to I found myself in a ravine, with trees overhanging one side, but the rest of it bare rock. It was a kind of bowl, with only one way of getting in or out that I could see, and that was kept closed by a big rock which was pushed about by four or five men who seemed to have that particular job. I noticed that all of them wore cartridge belts and revolvers in holsters.

In fact, all the men in this big bowl—about fifty, I should say—carried revolvers, and I saw that there were rifles stacked about the place.

There was no particular uniform—just flannel shirts, slouch hats, and handkerchiefs at their necks, with rough pants and high boots—but I didn't need to be told that here was a detachment of the Louis Riel troops.

I'd heard that there were several secret camps, and that the rebels so far had managed to hide from the government forces until they would have time to get together and put up a good fight. This was one of

the camps, of course. But whereabouts it was, except that it could not be very far from the C. P. line, I didn't know.

These thoughts passed through my mind while I was led over to one corner of the big space, where the jagged rocks made a sort of anteroom. Captain Maurice had gone away, but there were plenty of men to take care of me; and when one of them untied my arms and shoved me hard into the little prison—for that was what it seemed to be—I stumbled and went down on my knees.

I got up fighting mad; but it wasn't any use. One of those guys whacked me over the shoulder with his six-gun. He aimed for my head, but missed. It told me what was what, however; so I sat down on a ledge of rock against the wall and said nothing.

It was getting daylight, but was still dusky. I could see men moving about, and soon a smell of hot coffee told me that breakfast was getting ready. I didn't want any breakfast, and I hoped the coffee would choke the birds who got it. There were two men marching up and down in front of where I sat, with rifles on their shoulders, and I saw other men with guns standing about like sentries.

Louis Riel knew something about soldiering, and this camp was as full of business as any I had ever seen in the regular army in my own country. Leon Boudereau, the brakie, had told me that Riel was a bear on discipline and that every one under him had to toe the mark.

It's strange how fatigue will get away with a fellow even when he is deadly danger. Here I was a prisoner in a camp of outlaws, guarded by men—half-breeds, mostly—who would shoot me as readily as they would a rat, and without any reasonable hope of getting away. Yet, as I sat on that rocky ledge, trying to figure on some way of escape, blessed if I didn't drop asleep! Fast asleep, with my head against the wall, before I knew it.

Of course, like most railroaders, I had always been able to sleep at any time or anywhere—even on top of a jolting freight car or on the steps of an engine cab. But that was all in the day's work, without any more danger than what hangs over every railroad man at all times. This camp, with murderers all around me, was different.

I'd been through a good deal that night, and I suppose I was about played out. Anyway, I must have slept quite awhile, for when I was awakened by somebody shaking my arm it was broad day, and I could see the sun coming up over the trees at the top of the ravine wall.

Most of these Riel men were hard-looking citizens, but the fellow who had shaken me out of my sleep and another one who was there to see I didn't get too fresh looked a little worse than the others. I reckon there was more Indian blood in them than in the other fellows. They had the wickedest eyes I've ever seen in a man—and they never winked. Both of 'em had rifles, with revolvers hanging to their belts.

As I jumped to my feet I was hustled outside the little rocky prison and marched across the open space to where Captain Maurice was standing, with four of his men drawn up at attention, with rifles on their shoulders. They were looking straight ahead and were as stiff and still as wooden men.

"What's your name?" asked Maurice in English, as the two soldiers who had marched me over pulled me around with a jerk to face him.

"Martin McCarthy," I told him. "American; working for the Canadian Pacific Railway Company; and—"

Maurice made a sign, and one of the men at my side clapped a hand over my mouth, while the other pointed his gun at my chest. I figured I'd better shut up.

"Take down his name," says Maurice to a man by his side, who held a notebook and pencil. "Never mind the other things he said."

The man with the notebook was in a flannel shirt and slouch hat like the others, and his revolver was ready to his hand in a holster. He gave me a grin I didn't like when he wrote my name.

Captain Maurice didn't waste time over what he had to say. He hands it out in a steady, cold voice:

"Martin McCarthy, you are charged with giving information to the enemy of

the operations of some of the troops of the patriotic army under General Louis Riel, and also with killing one of our soldiers. Your case has been considered by the proper officers, and *you are sentenced to death.*" He turned to the fellow with the notebook. " Take all that down."

" But, say, captain," I broke in, " this ain't regular. I haven't told anybody anything about you or your people, and I don't know who ' the enemy ' is. You're not going to murder me without giving me a chance, are you?"

" There is only one punishment for a spy the world over," he comes back, his words like icicles. " And you have no right to talk about ' murder '; you murderered one of our men last night by a shot from ambush."

Right then I did a fool thing—though I maintain it was natural enough, considering everything. I broke away from the two half-breeds who had me between them and made a dash for the only exit, at the other end of the rocky bowl, a couple of hundred yards away.

Of course I didn't get far. One of the fellows loafing about tripped me by shoving his rifle in front of my feet, and I went down ker-smash.

About a dozen of 'em grabbed me then, and while I heard some sharp orders in French and English without seeing who gave them, I was hustled across the bowl and planted with my back against the rocky wall. My hands were tied behind me, and to make it more binding my legs were roped together from ankles to above the knees. I was no more able to move than if I'd been a stuffed club.

I knew what it all meant, even before I saw the four men, who had been drawn up by Captain Maurice while he talked to me, marching steadily forward, with the captain giving orders in his sharp voice.

One of two men standing near showed me a bandanna, motioning that he would tie it over my eyes. But I shook my head, and he fell back.

Things came fast then. The four men drew up in a line facing me, about twenty feet away, and dropped the butts of their rifles on the rocky ground with a crash. Those fellows had a great idea of military precision, but it didn't make a hit with me.

Captain Maurice gave another order, and the four rifles were leveled at my chest. I don't know what the order was. Likely it was " Make ready!" or " Aim!" or something. Whatever it was, I knew that nothing but the crook of a finger was between me and the promised land, and I yelled something—I don't know what—and lunged forward.

As I fell on my face on the hard ground there was a deafening explosion and I could hear bullets rattling against the rocky wall. The four men had fired just as I went down and they'd missed me by about an inch.

Tied hand and foot as I was, I couldn't move, and my face was badly cut by the loose stones. But nobody took notice of that. They had me on my feet against the wall in a minute, and Captain Maurice was swearing in two languages. Then he gave an order, and two men stepped forward on either side of me and at arm's length shoved the muzzles of their rifles against my shoulders, holding me so that I couldn't throw myself over again and so I would make a good target.

The firing squad were ready again. But Captain Maurice held back the order to " Aim!" while he looked me over with a snarling grin that told me he meant to get me this time.

He was trying to tease me into saying something; but I wouldn't give him that satisfaction. I looked away from him as if he wasn't there, and sized up the four men who were to shoot me. I could see they were all pretty well broken up. Missing me the way they had, the whole business was getting on their nerves. They were all white-faced and their mouths hung open in the loose way that showed they didn't like what they had to do.

The fellow on the end to my left looked worse than the other three. His eyes were moving about like a crazy man's, and his mouth wabbled as if he hadn't any control of it. If he had been the only one to shoot at me I would have bet even money he'd miss.

All this took only a few seconds. Maurice straightened up, and I saw he held a

white handkerchief in his right hand. Dropping the handkerchief would be the signal to "Fire!" He snapped out "Aim!" and the four guns were pointed shakily at my heart.

I made up my mind that here was where I passed out, and I gritted my teeth so that I would take it like a man.

I saw Captain Maurice raise his right hand, white handkerchief and all, as high as he could reach, so that he could bring it down with a swoop that the firing squad would surely see.

For a second or two he kept his hand up there. Then, as his wrist muscles tightened—it's funny how a man will notice little things like that when he is in such a fix as I was—and before he could bring the handkerchief down, a frightful, unearthly squeal came from the man on the left end of the squad, and he lurched right across the front of the line, falling flat and knocking every rifle down as he went over. He was in an epileptic fit; the strain had been too much for him.

In a second there was confusion all about us, with Captain Maurice giving orders and men rushing about to fill them. Then, at the very height of the excitement, when it seemed as if every one was crazy, and when I was wondering whether there wasn't some way I could beat the game, there came a quick change that made me think I must be going dippy.

Every man in the great bowl had stopped just where he happened to be, with his heels together, his body stiff, and his right hand raised to his forehead in salute. There was perfect stillness.

Of course, the next moment I saw what it meant. A rather tall, lean man, with high cheek bones, piercing eyes, and a walk that told he was used to being the boss, strode down the center of the ravine from the entrance and touched the brim of his slouch hat with his forefinger. He was acknowledging all the salutes in one movement, and he did it like an emperor.

It was Louis Riel himself.

He walked straight over to Captain Maurice, pointed a long finger at me, and says in a sharp voice:

"Let that man go!"

Maurice looked as if he wanted to say something. But, if you'd ever seen Louis Riel, you'd know he wasn't the man to be argued with.

The ropes were cut off me, and Riel, giving me one quick look, without speaking, pointed to the exit.

That was good enough for me. I was some stiff from being tied up as I had been, but I made good time walking out of the ravine at that.

How that marvelous escape of mine had come about I didn't know till I'd got clear of the Riel camp and was wondering how I'd find my way through the woods to my Number Seven shack on the railroad. Then a man suddenly stepped in front of me and gave me a slap on the shoulder, as he says:

"Good boy, Mac! I was there when they brought you in, and I felt that it would be a firing squad in the morning for yours. Maurice thinks that's always the easiest way. But I knew how to get hold of the chief—I'm pretty close to General Riel—and I brought him just in time."

"Well, I don't know for sure about that," I says. "If one of that firing squad hadn't thrown a noisy fit at a lucky moment—But never mind. You showed you were a friend of mine and I'll always remember it, old top!"

"No, don't!" he comes back with a twisted grin. "Forget it. I fixed up that stunt about the boxes of guns, and because I got you into trouble I felt I ought to get you out.

"Aside from that, I'm going to stay right with the Riel expedition from now on, and I'd rather not have the C. P. people know I was helping Riel while I was working for the company. Well, good-by, Mac. Keep your back to the sun and you'll strike the railroad before noon. After that it will be easy for you to find your way down the line to Station Seven."

He slipped away among the trees, and that was the last I ever saw of Leon Boudereau.

They hanged Louis Riel later. I hope they didn't do the same thing to Leon.

THE END

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